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BONNIE BIRD GUNDLACH: DANCER AND DANCE EDUCATOR

Interviews Conducted by William Riess and Heidi Gundlach-Smith

July to November 1994

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Bonnie Bird Gundlach was a dancer and dance educator whose life and work spanned a period of tremendous creativity in the arts and considerable turmoil in social and political life as well. She was intimately involved in dance education both in the United States and England where she spent the last twenty years of her life.

The following oral history interviews were conducted in the summer of 1994 in Tiburon, California. Bonnie had become ill in England and returned to California to seek treatment for what was quickly diagnosed as cancer of the liver. While this was a difficult time for her, she was able to be with her daughter, Heidi Gundlach-Smith, and to have the great joy of seeing her first grandchild and namesake, Bonnie Devon Smith who was born October 8, 1994. After a brief period of remission, the cancer returned, and Bonnie died on April 9, 1995.

This project has been very much an extended family matter. The idea was first proposed by Suzanne Riess, a senior editor in the Regional Oral History Office of The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley; she had known Bonnie for many years. The interviewer was Suzanne's former husband, Bill Riess, whom Bonnie called her "summer son" when he was in high school. Heidi Gundlach was present for most of the interviews, participating from time to time, and she video-taped those interviews. Transcribing was done by Judith Cederblom of Seattle, Washington. Judith is the long-time companion of John Riess, brother of Bill Riess. Bill and John's father, Bernard F. Riess, a psychologist, was a colleague and close friend of Ralph Gundlach, Bonnie's husband. The two men had close collegial connections as psychologists and shared many concerns, especially in having had parallel experiences during the harrowing days of the McCarthy era. The Riess house on Lake Waramaug in New Preston, Connecticut, was the center of their family summers for a period of years.

Additional interview participants were Shirley Winn, Anthony Bowne, and Marion North, all close friends and collaborators of Bonnie's whose visits to her in Tiburon coincided with the interviewing process. Their presence sharpened the focus on the history of the Laban Center in England and its Transitions Dance Company. It was at Bonnie's suggestion that they joined the interviews.

Shannon Page and Suzanne Riess of the Regional Oral History Office completed the interviews on the model of the Oral History Office. This included format conversion of the transcripts, tape auditing, editing, name checking and preparing queries. Bonnie's final illness precluded any review by her of the transcript. The points marked in the text with { } brackets, questions that would have been easily answered by her, are left to the researcher and scholar of dance history, to whom this oral history will be invaluable.

A recently published biography of Bonnie Bird, *Frontiers: The Life and Times of Bonnie Bird, American Modern Dancer and Dance Educator*, by Karen Bell-Kanner [Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998] may be an interesting and helpful supplement to the oral history that follows.

Funding for this volunteer oral history of Bonnie Bird was primarily through gifts in kind. A financial contribution from Marion North helped to defray some of the production costs of the project.

William F. Riess
Suzanne B. Riess

Berkeley, California
February 2000

Guide to the Photographs

- Page 1 Nelle Fisher, Kenneth Bostock, and Bonnie Bird on the roof of the Cornish School, the spring after Martha Graham taught at Cornish. Bonnie Bird performing her dance, "Sarabande," probably 1938.
- Page 2 A dance performed at Cornish School where Bonnie taught after returning from New York. Bonnie Bird on the left; Merce Cunningham, second from left; Syvilla Fort, second from right.
- Page 3 Michael Gundlach, Heidi Gundlach, Bonnie Bird Gundlach, John Scott Gundlach, and Ralph Gundlach, Corte Madera, California, the summer of 1958 or 1959.
- Bonnie Bird wearing a pin given her by Alexander Calder, at Mills College or University of California, Berkeley, mid to late 1940's.
- Page 4 Bonnie Bird in England, late 1970's









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Interview with Bonnie Bird Gundlach ("Bonnie")
Interviewers: William Riess ("Bill") and Heidi Gundlach ("Heidi")
[Interview 1: July 25, 1994]
[begin tape 1, side A]

I AN OVERVIEW OF EARLY INFLUENCES

Bonnie's World in 1931: Dance and Political Awareness

Bonnie: You were asking about my political awareness, and it's interesting, if I were to think of my development politically, being politically aware, or my politicizing--[laughs] that's not exactly the right word--when I arrived in New York [in 1931] I was utterly naive.

Heidi: And you were seventeen?

Bonnie: Seventeen. I had really no real awareness of the politics of the world or how things were operating. It was at the very beginning of the Depression. We had had the impact that my father had gone bankrupt in 1929. He was in the automobile business, and he had multiple auto-related things, like an insurance company and things like this. All of them went out. If he had not given my mother the house we lived in as a present, and that was partly because he was trying to convince her to live in the country, because he believed we would never grow up with any sense of responsibility unless we had to care for animals and run a farm, so to speak, we wouldn't have had a place to live.

So I went to New York with {Bonnie, finish sentence, something about little awareness?}--. Shortly after I was in New York the banks were closed, so that for weeks I couldn't get any money. I only had a little savings account, and I was living on fifty dollars a month, which is what my father could send, and going to school because I had a scholarship that year, fellowship the next year. Those were some of the first steps in my really being aware of what poverty was and its implications for people.

In the course of that time in New York there was an increasing political awareness, but I didn't become part of it. I was proselytized by many friends who were moving left and moving into becoming members of the Communist party and so on, to join them in various things, but I was very much involved with Martha Graham in a personal way. That is, I was a kind of acolyte or surrogate child in some ways.

She felt that because Dorothy Bird and I came from the West Coast, and she'd brought us East, she had a greater responsibility to us, because she thought we were naive as hell, and that was

true. There was a kind of acting out of a family on her part and Louis's [Louis Horst] part, and there were no men in the company at that time, so this whole family thing was very much more pronounced.

But I had had more exposure than I realized, perhaps, to what was going on in the world through all these friends, mostly members of the Graham company or their spouses who were all politically very active. And when I went back to Seattle in 1937-38 to teach at the Cornish School, I was open to a great deal more. That's when I met Ralph. But before I met Ralph--or I think I had actually met him, but I wasn't going with him at that point--I was asked to do a fundraising for the Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy. That was really the first political involvement that I had.

Bill: Was the Spanish Civil War going on then?

Bonnie: Then it was, yes. It had just really begun in '36.

I was well aware, knew some of the artists that were supporting--many artists in New York, for example, were doing fundraisers to send ambulances and so on. The only thing you could legally give to was the medical assistance. It couldn't be direct political assistance, because there was an embargo by the United States on anything going to Spain. This was a very detrimental position taken by the U.S.

I became acutely aware then of this particular development, and increasingly aware of the huge changes that had gone on from the early thirties in Germany. I was in the Graham company when Graham refused to go to the Olympics in 1936, the huge Olympics at which her company was to be one of the satellites of artistic things they always do in connection with the Olympics, which was in Berlin. She refused to go, and took a very good position, because there were Jewish members of her company. She made this public when it was a very courageous kind of position to take.

Bill: Had she been involved politically before?

Bonnie: Never to that degree, publicly. She was certainly sympathetic to the attitudes and positions of people in trade unions, in arts organizations, and so on, and had been approached many times by people like Marc Blitzstein and so on to become more politically involved. Martha--

Bill: Can I interrupt just a minute? [tape interruption] I'm sorry about the interruption.

Bonnie: That's all right. I was just thinking that actually, as my memory goes back, there were many more early events that added to this education, so to speak, personal education.

Heidi: Like what?

Bonnie: Well, the fact, and in an interesting way, I haven't seen any writing on Graham that acknowledges the fact, that many of the supporters of Graham and of contemporary dance were the trade unions. They were building their organizations, and they were very broad. They included cultural responsibilities, and many of the trade unions had Saturday events for children, and they presented concerts. The Ladies Garment Workers actually sponsored some wonderful musicals that were written by members and performed by members of the needle trades, for example.

Bill: "Pins and Needles," was that?

Bonnie: "Pins and Needles" was one, that's right. And Marc Blitzstein wrote, stimulated by that, "No for an Answer" and various other of the musicals he did. These were all left-wing-supported things. We performed in trade union halls, which were pretty big, sort of high schooly-looking theaters. She had a lot of support which she never really acknowledged later, as it got to be politically difficult. So it's gotten forgotten, in a way.

Jane Dudley is a person, and some of the others, Sophie Maslow, still alive, they were members of the company at that time who were very politically active themselves in forming the New Dance Group and the Red Dance League, and various things like that. They have much more detailed information on that, and are very strong about it, too.

Bill: Were the people from the trade unions involved in dance as well as in supporting it?

Bonnie: Many of them studied dance. There were so many--the New Dance Group was formed in about '31 or '32, and its purpose was a Marxist purpose, that you had a dance class, and then you had a meeting, a political meeting. People came in droves to study dance. They were poor working people coming out of factories, and working-class people, and that was a great appeal.

They were also--you may remember that Emma Phillips was part of a whole community in Brooklyn or Queens, I can't remember exactly, a sort of community of left-wing people, and it moved into the same area. They were very active for years and years and years, supporting all kinds of things, and many aspects that were cultural, not just political, with a political orientation to the

cultural things they supported. And literally, many artists who would never have found their way through any other avenues came to prominence through the activities of the left wing, trade unions' and political organizations' support of cultural events and the importance of culture.

I have a student who lives here in California, Stacy Prickett {?}, whom I encouraged to do her M.A. thesis and then her Ph.D. thesis on the role of the political left in the development of contemporary dance.

Bill: Well, the political left had a very broad view, didn't they, of what was encompassed as political?

Bonnie: Right.

Bill: And it certainly included the arts.

Bonnie: Right.

Separating Away, 1937, Back in Seattle

Bonnie: I think that when I arrived in Seattle, even though I hadn't been as directly involved, because I followed Graham's attitude, and I don't know where I would have stuffed in any more time, because I taught so much and rehearsed and worked at earning a living, I don't know that I--well, I was just not intellectually ready to take kinds of responsibility politically.

When I went to Seattle [in 1937] and was the first time on my own--one of the reasons that I wanted to go to Seattle was I was ready to leave the company, and I've said it before, that I could not distinguish where Graham left off and I began, because it was so locked in, because I was a principal teacher for her, and trying extremely hard to be absolutely accurate in the kinds of things I said and so on.

I was very distressed frequently by members of the company and other people who'd studied with Graham who then tried to sound like they had all the original ideas, never acknowledged where their ideas came from at all. I found this reprehensible. So I was even more furious and strict about acknowledging what I said, but it also ended up that I didn't know what I thought, [laughter] and that was beginning to bug me a good deal. I would go to concerts and things and think, "This is what I think, but what does somebody else think?" I wasn't secure at all.

Bill: Or, "This is what Graham thinks"?

Bonnie: Yes, yes, "This is what Graham thinks, or Lily thinks." I would want to put my point of view forward, which was sometimes different, but I didn't have the ego strength to do that at that time.

Bill: I wonder if that family thing we were talking about before plays a part here too, where you were part of the family and it was hard to see yourself as being separate from it.

Bonnie: Right, the Graham family. Yes, indeed. And a lot of my own identity, so to speak, was developing because of this identification.

When I was in Seattle, being asked to do the Spanish Refugee Appeal or the International Brigade Medical Bureau fundraiser was not difficult at all. I just said, "Yes," immediately, I didn't even ask any questions. I knew what it was, and it was hitting the West Coast, and that was already a big step, because everything came out of the big urban centers of Los Angeles and Chicago and New York in support of the left wing.

I knew nothing of the history of Washington [State] politically at all, that it had been called the Soviet state of the U.S. [laughs], Washington. There were maps where it was a little red state, and it was because of the International Workers of the World, the Wobblies, who came in to organize early. Because there were these huge lumber camps and huge problems of ports, it was a very active state.

There was huge exploitation of workers who moved from the Middle West and the East to work in the canneries and in the lumber camps; they were very badly exploited. So there was a base for developing trade unionism there. It became a very trade union-conscious state, and many of the earlier unions were there.

The American Legion fought the ILWU very severely, and there was a killing out in Centralia by the American Legion killing Wobblies.

Bill: Who were on strike, or who were just organizing?

Bonnie: I'd have to look up exactly what the circumstances were, but I know that Merce Cunningham's father was the judge for that trial.

Bill: Oh, really? I hadn't realized that he was from Washington.

Bonnie: Not something Merce pushes [laughing], because I don't think he thought very highly of it himself.

Dad and the Family Farm in Bothell

Bill: Where was your dad on these issues?

Bonnie: Well, it's hard for me to say in the early years. I think my mother was a Democrat, my father was a Republican. My father was a Republican because he was a businessman and saw things rather in a conservative, highly independent sort of way. Every man had to work for what he earned, and so on. And highly ethical. He was one of the rare people who somebody once said to me was the one honest automobile dealer in the city of Seattle. [laughs]

Bill: I wondered if his ethical sense might have made him more responsive to, let's say, the Wobblies going at the injustice and the exploitation.

Bonnie: I think those issues, yes. On an ethical basis, he would be quite sympathetic to them. And of course, later, when I and Ralph were quite involved, my family never flinched from giving their farm for political fundraising affairs. When we were supporting Hugh DeLacy {?} for congressman, I always had brilliant ideas about having a barn party and using big hayricks to have the political speakers speak from. [laughter] They were very effective affairs, and Mother and Dad were the hosts.

Bill: Where was the farm?

Bonnie: It was in Woodenville, that one. We first lived in Bothell, from the time I was about ten, eleven, something along that line. Dad decided, while Mother had taken us East to visit her family for about three months--Scott was just a baby, and we're ten years apart--while we were East, Dad decided that he was going to sell the little bungalow that we lived in the Madrona District in Seattle, and had lived in since I was maybe three or four or something like that. He was going to move us out to Bothell, Washington.

Now, the reason for moving into this area was that he and Ben Boone and a couple of other men who all hunted together--duck shooters and deer hunters and fishermen and so on--they had bought up a valley as their own duck-shooting area. They bought a lot of land in this valley, just outside of Bothell. Ben Boone had already moved and built a house on a sort of hill on the side of the valley, and a couple of the other men too were building around.

They'd all been ranchers or farmers at some time, so even though they were--in Ben's case, although he was a stockbroker, he was really a cattle rancher, because that was his history from

Texas. Ben actually ran cattle in the valley. Dad decided to buy a house which was on another knoll overlooking this same valley. Another section of it was farmed by a friend of theirs, a co-member of this group, who all played poker together every week.

So when Mother and the boys and I came back, probably around December or so, because I went to school in Connecticut, in Norwalk where my mother's family lived, Dad had moved us to this huge house, absolutely mammoth house.

Bill: That he built, or had bought?

Bonnie: No, it had been built by a photographer in Seattle, and it was to be his white palace. He had a ton of crushed marble, and after the house was built--it was all a sort of stucco, the raw stucco of the house--this white crushed marble was to be thrown up so it would glisten. Well, he was killed in an automobile accident, apparently, driving the seventeen miles from Seattle to Bothell, so the house was up for sale, and Dad bought it. This was about, I would think, maybe 1926 or something, and this was a period of affluence, of course, for Dad. He had the automobile business, he had a trucking business, he had automobile insurance, and so on. So he bought the house, including the animals, and got other animals.

At that time, Mother had a helper who was an Indian boy from Alaska named Edward Henry, his American name. His Indian name was Lickchaw {?}, and I don't know what tribe he was from, but it was one of the coastal Indian fishing groups. He had been sent to a great sort of valley with wonderful green grass and so on--the Bureau of Indian Affairs felt they had to get these impoverished Indians into dairying. [laughs] They never drink milk, and they know nothing about cattle or any inland sort of stuff!

So this young man, who was the son of the head of a tribe, was sent as a teenager to a dairy farm and school in Oregon. He couldn't stand the smell of milk, couldn't stand cows, and he couldn't stand the whole thing, and so he ran away. He landed in Seattle. Somebody my father knew said, "There is this Indian kid, and he's really lost." He was a boy who was badly scarred from his neck down to his shoulder, and one elbow had been crushed as a younger child in some boat accident.

He--this is totally a side thing--had said the scarring came from an Indian medicine man. I'm not quite sure if that was true, but that was one of the stories, and that has a long tale associated with it, which I won't go into now. But he had lived with us for a couple of years, helping Mother, because Scott was a baby and she needed a bit of help. She was putting him on the

right track towards respecting his parents and so on. And we lived on an island in the summers, and he adored living on this island, Bainbridge Island.

Anyway, when he came out with Mother to look at the house, which had an enormous living room and a library room and just everything was very big, he said he would only come--he didn't like the idea of living in the country, I think--he would only come if he could wear roller skates. [laughter] And my mother said, "On these hardwood floors, absolutely not." So he didn't come.

Bill: Had he gone East with your mother and you?

Bonnie: No, he hadn't. He had stayed in Seattle. And I think it was at that time that--some of the friends of my father were terrific gamblers, including their wives, and they had private gambling parties. Some of the women liked him to stand behind them while they handled {what?}--for good luck. One of them I think sort of took him on as her gigolo, and offered him a job in the city, and heavens knows what happened. He probably became a permanent gigolo, I have no idea. But he didn't come to the farm.

I was in the eighth grade when we moved to the farm, so I must have been twelve, I think, or just finishing elementary school in Madrona. Dad gave us each a horse, introduced us to all the animals. There were wild Indian game chickens and quackless ducks, because Mother didn't like noisy ducks, and a number of other sort of odd creatures.

[end tape 1, side A]

[begin tape 1, side B]

Bonnie: He walked us around the farm and said, "I'll teach you how to take care of these animals." I was absolutely thrilled, because we each had a horse.

Mother's Specialist Teacher Training

Heidi: Now, your mom didn't know--how long had you been gone?

Bonnie: Just three months. Well, I'm sure that Mother knew something of what was going on, and she was of two minds, I think, because she was essentially an urban person, had never farmed. It wasn't really going to be a real farm, so she didn't have to be that scared about it. But she didn't know how to drive a car so I think she was wondering if she was going to be trapped.

She was also excited about it. My mother was quite a theatrically-minded person, so she loved the grandeur of the place. It was sitting above the little town of Bothell on a hill with a magnificent view out over the valley, and it was only a short walk down into the town. There was a big orchard in the front of the house, and there was a huge sort of semi-circular concrete porch. You could sit and look out over the town. It was really grand, and Mother was ready, I think, for a little grandeur.

Heidi: Taken by it.

Bonnie: She was always taken by the grand gesture.

So we moved in, and of course, our furniture didn't fill this place at all, and some of it was pretty ratty. I can remember my mother's solution to many problems was to say, if she knew guests were coming and there was a hole in the couch, she'd say, "Throw a red coat over it. Nobody will notice." [laughter] She was full of sort of this dramatic flair kind of thing.

Things I think went really quite well for my father for quite a while with his business, and then of course came the crash. The crash was in '29, but it didn't hit the West Coast as fast. Things started collapsing around banks, et cetera, in the major industrial centers and so on, and it sort of hit the West Coast a bit later, in 1930. I was just finishing high school--well, I had just started to work with Graham, because Graham had come to the Cornish School to teach, and that's a whole other story. So I was ready to go off to college.

Well, there was no chance that my father could finance even my going to the University of Washington. And there was nothing at the University of Washington that I wanted to do, because I had been at the Cornish School every day from the time I was thirteen, probably, studying, and earlier than that from about seven going once, twice, three times a week, studying.

I was lucky, because I got a scholarship which was arranged by Graham for me to go to the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York. My father figured he could afford fifty dollars a month for me to live.

My mother was very much for my going, because she thoroughly believed in my having some kind of profession. She herself felt trapped, because she had been a teacher, and a very special teacher, a trained specialist teacher teaching teachers, and had come to Seattle because she was in a team trained by--Nicholas Murray Butler was one person involved for the U.S. Education

Department, and he was then president of Columbia University. And there's another man whose name I can't remember who was the educator trainer, who was at Yale, which was not far from {Hillrock?}.

They were training teachers to go out throughout the United States in teams to different cities to demonstrate teaching of a higher caliber. It was an effort to raise standards in elementary education. My mother was assigned with a small group of women to go to Seattle. She was very thrilled. She thought she was going to be teaching aborigines! [laughter]

She was terribly disappointed going across the United States by train, because all the Indians wore store clothes. So Seattle was quite a surprise to her. She taught in the Seward School, which is still extant, I think as a specialist in fifth grade teaching. So she was a demonstration teacher. She taught teachers, and they would come watch her teach and so on. And when she married a couple of years later, she was out. No married woman was employed in public schools.

Bill: You had to be a spinster?

Bonnie: You had to be a spinster. As soon as you knew anything about sex, you were verboten.

This was very fretful for my mother. She didn't fret in the beginning, because she was so busy with having a family, but it was later, when time became important. She was a funny character, again. She didn't want to come in and start over, and sort of build it. She wanted to come in where she would have been, and that was always a kind of frustration.

Bill: You were saying she felt trapped, and kind of moved out of being a teacher of teachers to being a housewife and mother.

Bonnie: That's right. And many women did. This was a big thing.

She eventually threw herself into PTA work, and became president of the State of Washington PTA, and was all over the place. This was after we were really all pretty well grown up. My brother was still at home, I think, when she was doing this.

Bill: Did she support dance as a profession for you?

Bonnie: She supported me in dance all the way through, and so did my father. That was quite a lot to support, because living in Bothell I had to be driven to school every morning. I was up every morning at six with my brothers. This was part of our

contract with Dad, that we had to clean the barns and feed the horses and check out all the work that needed to be done, and then we went off to school. So we were up at six, did our jobs and had breakfast, and then left.

Bill: And where was school?

Bonnie: My brothers went to the local school in Bothell, and I went to Roosevelt High School, which was in the northern part of Seattle, a very good high school. Dad would drop me off and then go on to his job--he still had a used-car place.

Bill: That was what remained after the crash?

Bonnie: That was what he was able to redevelop.

The Cornish School

Bonnie: Then he would meet me at the Cornish School, because I would leave high school at about two o'clock. I didn't have to do gym beyond my first year at Roosevelt because they recognized I was getting all the athletics I needed, and I was excused from it so I could leave early and go to Cornish by the streetcars which ran there.

Bill: Could you back up a little bit and say a little bit about Cornish School?

Bonnie: The Cornish School was established I think about 1914 by Nellie Cornish, who was herself a music teacher, born in Blaine, Washington, of an early pioneering family. Nellie was just a very extraordinary person. She was about five feet tall and as round as she was tall. [laughter] A very determined lady. There is an interesting book on her called Miss Aunt Nellie, it's her biography, and so their story is more accurate than mine.

Nellie Cornish became fired with the idea of music education, and there were quite a few remarkable leaders in this field of music education in the U.S. One of them was Calvin Baynard Cadie {?}--I believe that's his name--I think he was either in California or on the East Coast, I don't remember. He was ready to retire, I think, and she got him to the Cornish School to establish a really extraordinary music department, where children came, and they didn't just study an instrument, but they studied solfege and harmony.

Bill: Solfege? What is that?

Bonnie: It's a part of the musical training of note values--I don't know that I can even describe it to you now.

So the training was a very kind of whole training. It was a music education, not just playing an instrument without knowing its history or anything about it. Gradually this school began to expand, and she added visual arts and drama and ultimately dance--very early. By 1920 there were all these departments.

Bill: How was the school funded?

Bonnie: By a whole board of women who were wealthy Seattle women, culturally-minded, and they raised the money to make up the difference from the tuition costs. Finally, in I'm not quite sure what year, 1920, '22, something--I could look it up--they built the Cornish School. Capitol Hill has a magnificent view out over all of Seattle.

Bill: Is it still there?

Bonnie: Oh, yes, it's still going. It's now called the Cornish Institute, because it offers a degree. You can do an associate degree there, and go on then and complete in a university your third and fourth year. And maybe they're offering beyond that now, I don't know.

Nellie Cornish had tremendous support and great vision. She traveled the world three months out of every year and made acquaintances everywhere. She was a very gregarious person, and very astute about people. She had access to extraordinary places in Europe and so on through her friends, so she brought remarkable people, just remarkable teachers. The Cornish School was better respected outside of Seattle than it was in Seattle, because people who knew something about the arts knew what an unusual vision this was.

Bill: What led you to go to the Cornish School?

Heidi: Asthma. [laughing]

Bonnie: No, asthma didn't do it. That was a side event.

Heidi: That was how she started dancing.

Early Dance Exposure: Caird Leslie, Anna Pavlova

Bonnie: When I was about four years old, I guess, before we moved to the Madrona District, and when my brother Bill was probably only a year old or so, or maybe two years old, we lived in the

Laurelhurst District of Seattle. Our house, a little bungalow sort of house, had a big porch on it, and it was on a slight hill, so the next house was a little bit lower than ours.

I used to sit on the porch rail of our house, which was kind of a wide rail, and look down into the dining room of the house next and watch a young man who was doing his ballet exercises. I didn't know what he was doing, but his mother turned over the dining room for him. His name was Caird Leslie, and my mother and his mother were very good friends. He was probably nineteen or twenty, I suppose. He had trained as a ballet dancer. He was very thin and very aesthetic, very camp in some ways.

He was intrigued that this little girl kept watching him. He saw me, and we got to be friends, and so I began to learn a little bit about what he was doing. I can't remember a thing, except I can remember seeing him moving around in the room.

Bill: He had a barre, and mirrors?

Bonnie: A barre, I don't remember mirrors, but he had a barre at the window. He was a member of Adolph Bolm's Ballet Intime. Adolph Bolm had been Anna Pavlova's partner, and was trained in Russia and a very famous teacher. He had his own company called the Ballet Intime.

Bill: Based in Seattle?

Bonnie: No, it was in New York or someplace, I don't even remember. He toured a lot, and Caird was in this company. When Anna Pavlova came into town to do a concert, he asked Mother if he could take me to see Pavlova. I was probably seven about that time, six or seven. He took me backstage afterwards, because he knew some of the dancers in the company.

I met Pavlova, who was very tiny, and I had been absolutely transfixed by this concert--I remember very distinctly that the first dance was done by the members of her company, and I thought they were magical. It was, I don't know, "Something of--" Autumn, I think, or something--anyway, leaves were falling, and they were dancing amongst them, and nice drapes. [laughs]

Bill: This was the first dance performance you ever saw?

Bonnie: No, I think I'd seen one earlier, which I'll tell you about, actually of Adolph Bolm's company. But that came about for another reason. I'm not quite sure which came in front of which, really, now in memory.

But I had been going to be a veterinarian, all kinds of things. With the little English that Pavlova knew when she met me she said, "And what are you going to be when you grow up?" I said, "I'm going to be a dancer." And it was like taking the vow for life! I could have been a nun. I just decided that was for me.

Then I forgot about it immediately, but not about the event. And I was telling you that when Pavlova came on suddenly all those dancers in that first dance looked like clunks to me. She was just so marvelous and so tiny and exquisite, they seemed stocky and bovine in a way. [laughter] I was enchanted by this difference. At least I was recognizing the difference in the quality of excellence, which I didn't know at that time.

Muriel Stewart, who was a member of the company at this time, and whom I became a good friend of many years later, said that Pavlova actually did hire less good dancers--.

Heidi: Oh, to show herself off!

Bonnie: To show herself off. Not bad dancers, but not her caliber. She wasn't going to have that around.

So I went home, and nothing happened. I had asthma as a child, and a severe allergy to fish, which had been discovered when I was about four. Whatever immunization I had to it broke down one night, and I began choking and turning black and so on, and Mother thought I had a fish bone in me and was hanging me upside down to rattle it out.

Somehow, I went past the crisis, and the doctor, smartly, went through everything that was unusual in that day. We were a Catholic family, so we had fish on Fridays, and that was the unusual thing in our meal. He decided it was an allergy to fish, and very smartly, too, because they didn't know a lot about allergies then. So I just avoided fish. But I did have a kind of asthma reaction very easily to cold, or probably to other allergies that weren't recognized.

Caird Leslie came back to Seattle because he had an injury and couldn't dance with the company. After he was getting better, he began to think he should teach. He needed to earn an income. So he found a studio near the Broadway High School, and he called my mother and asked if I would like to take dance lessons. Well, I was absolutely entranced with the idea, and my mother called up the doctor and said, "Should I have her do this?" He said, "Anything that will stretch the lungs." [laughter]

I started once a week taking dance class. I stayed with him for several years--seven, eight, nine I think, something like that--and then Miss Cornish asked him to come to the Cornish School. So I went to the Cornish School with him and continued to study until I was thirteen or fourteen. By that time I was taking two lessons, three lessons, so on, probably up to about four lessons a week.

Bill: Was he still the only teacher?

Bonnie: He was the principal teacher. I don't think I ever had anybody else teach me. I don't remember--if he was sick and somebody substituted it would have been a student. There were other people in the department, but I don't remember who they were, and I think they mostly taught jazz or Spanish or something like that.

Bill: But his was classical ballet?

Bonnie: It was classical ballet, and very well taught. He was a very good teacher. And I appeared in performances, and my big thrill was playing Clara in "Nutcracker." It was just a little section from the "Nutcracker." I found the program the other day, and I had to laugh, because I thought the thing took up the whole program. It was one of about seventeen dances. [laughter]

Bill: But to you, it was the whole program.

Bonnie: To me, it was the whole thing. I had a little dance as Clara, and then I lay on a bear rug and dreamed the dance, and got pneumonia as a result, because the drafts were so bad backstage.

Heidi: Oh, no. How old were you?

Bonnie: Probably ten or eleven, or something like that. I don't know, we'd have to look at that program.

But the thing was that it was the first solo I ever had, however small it was, and it was memorable. My father and mother came and then took me to dinner afterwards. That was outstanding. [laughs] Gave me a corsage and that whole business--it was really quite something. They were totally supportive of this activity. My poor father at this point was having to run his life in terms of picking me up. Many nights I had rehearsals, so he had to stall around and wait--it was really a labor of love on his part.

Bill: Do you think it fit your mother's sense of theater and drama to have you be involved in this?

Bonnie: Well, my mother was determined that I was not going to be a housewife. I don't think she much cared what I did, so long as it was something. She wouldn't even let me learn how to cook. It wasn't that she took it away from me, it was that she just didn't involve me in the same way. Probably it was partly because she didn't like anybody in the kitchen when she was cooking anyway. But she kept saying things like, "Well, I'll tell you, if you know how to do it, you have to do it. If you don't know how to do it, you don't have to do it."

Bill: She was ahead of her time.

Bonnie: She was encouraging me to do all kinds of other things. She encouraged my writing, and of course, we wrote all the time {Bonnie, what's this, to whom? people back in Seattle? or do you mean writing as a creative pastime, like poetry, etc.?), because once we were out at Robin Hill, which was the name of our house in Bothell--I was so involved by then in going to school, and I went all day long, because I didn't finish until six.

Rich Cultural Tradition of the Cornish School

Bonnie: The Cornish School, coming back to that, was remarkable in that Miss Cornish had a view of the arts which was not separate. Everybody in the school, didn't matter if they took visual arts or whatever, had to study [Emile Jaques] Dalcroze's eurythmics.

Bill: Was she influenced by Rudolph Steiner?

Bonnie: I couldn't say if she was influenced by Steiner, but she was certainly influenced by many educationalists' theories at the time. I wouldn't be surprised if she was influenced by Steiner. But it wasn't eurythmics; that's a different thing than eurythmics.

Dalcroze was the great teacher and leader. He was actually a teacher of Mary Wigman before she went to work with Lubba {?}, so he was a big influence in this training of musicians. He actually developed his training to get musicians' whole bodies involved in rhythmic activity, because he felt that rhythm was a bodily thing that was expressed through how you used your hand or your voice or whatever, but you had to understand it in the body.

Bill: So there's a strong dance component as well.

Bonnie: Yes, very strong dance component. I hated it, but I had to do it. It was kind of also, you know, two against three--you had to do a rhythm in this arm and three in this arm. It was actually a

rather sterile kind of thing in many ways, and it was against my feeling about movement. I probably wasn't very good at it either.

Bill: Sterile because it just was so surreal?

Bonnie: It was a terribly intellectual approach. If you got good at it you'd push beyond that, but it took a long time to get very good at it. But it was a kind of synthesization--we never had an attitude that dance was the only thing in the world, and that dance was unrelated to other arts. You were just constantly mixed up in the school.

She also ran a Friday night concert series, and she invited the best artists coming West, or she encouraged them to come West, so every few Fridays if not every Friday there was a concert in the nice little theater. And she always made the artist stay Saturday morning to do an assembly for the children in the school.

Heidi: Like a master class, or like a lecture?

Bonnie: No, just like a lecture, sort of an informal thing. So we were able to hear--I heard John Jacob Miles and Doris whatever-her-name-was, his partner, doing folk songs--really retrieving Appalachian folk songs way early before other people were aware of them at all. And excellent violinists and so on. So we were always almost demanded that we had to come to the Saturday morning assemblies.

Bill: With a trip into town.

Bonnie: And Miss Cornish said things like, "I don't mind if you daydream, but you'd better make it practical." Merce quotes her wonderfully saying something at an assembly for the students when he first arrived. He was very impressed with this. She emphasized creativity, too.

Bill: Did she have a personal relationship with students, with you, for example?

Bonnie: Oh, yes. She was my mentor, and she bossed me around a lot. She also thought I was one of the most stubborn that she ever knew.

Bill: Needed more bossing.

Bonnie: Yes. [laughter]

It was probably in--gosh, I don't know exactly, about 1929, I guess, or 1930, I think she was having some trouble with Caird by this time, and it might have had to do with his personal and

social activities in town. He was getting himself in trouble as a homosexual, I think. She decided to drop the ballet emphasis and she had, in the meantime, become acquainted with Martha Graham-- she knew what was going on in Europe, she knew there was a whole new wind, and that this was important for the Cornish School to reflect, even though it was unknown practically on the West Coast.

She announced this to all of us who were dance majors, and that meant even after school, as well as going to full-time school, because there was a four-year training in dance for post-high school students, and in all the other arts too. There were about a thousand children that came a week to study at Cornish, and there were about five or six hundred full-time students studying in all the arts, and very, very advanced teaching, marvelous teachers. And they all knew all of us.

Anyway, when Miss Cornish called the dance people together and said Caird was leaving, and that we were not going to have ballet classes, we were going to have something new and important for us, I went into total rebellion, and immediately with all my friends organized an underground ballet society. [laughter]

Bill: Oh, there's your politics coming in.

Bonnie: I wasn't going to forgo all this that I knew, and so on. And we gave--I was president, and Kenny Bostock was treasurer, though we didn't need a treasurer! and Bell Fisher and Mary Lou Graham, all of us became contemporary dancers and were students at the time-- we gave ourselves ballet classes secretly. That was our rebellion.

Bill: At the school?

Bonnie: At the school, yes. We just took a studio--there were a lot of studios. I think we wanted to have it a little visible too, although I can't remember consciously, but the way we behaved, we certainly were trying to make a point. I think it just made Miss Cornish giggle, and she expected it.

[end tape 1, side B]

Interview 2: July 26, 1994
[begin tape 2, side A]

II FAMILY

Mother's Family: The Powerses of Norwalk

Bill: Okay, we're starting, and this is Thursday, July 26, 1994. So we're going to talk tonight about your mom and dad.

Bonnie: My mother came of Irish parentage. Her father was a Powers. I don't know his first name, although that's findable. He came from County Cork. Mother's mother was a Callahan, and I have no idea how she got to the U.S., or if she was second generation even. I'm hoping to find out through the only cousin that I have left of the Callahans, whom I'm close to. There's been some family history of the Callahans, so I may get a copy of it, because I'm totally puzzled. They were a large family, and there were a lot of sisters, and they all married and had rafts of family.

Heidi: Do you know some of their names?

Bonnie: I did meet some of them. I would hesitate to say names at the moment, because I think I've forgotten too many. I used to visit them in--what's the town out near South Hadley? That's funny, I can't think of the name of the town. It's in Massachusetts, and it's a very large town which has become almost entirely Puerto Rican now. It's very interesting, the whole configuration of this town.

I would visit them there, they had a big family house too. These Irish families tend to have big houses and big families, and then they multiplied all over the place. So the complexity of the family is really quite great, of Mother's family. I think some of them became doctors, and some were workers. I think Mother's family were almost entirely workers.

Her father, to my knowledge, I think stowed away, which was not uncommon for Irish boys to get out of Ireland by stowing away on freighters. He got to the United States. I don't know anything of the stories of how he got here or anything like that. But he ultimately got a job with the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad, which went through Norwalk, Stamford, Darien--still does--and on up to Boston.

I guess he was well enough off, because he started, probably as just a crew member, in the building of the railroads and the keeping up of the actual tracks, et cetera. To my knowledge, he became a foreman or in charge of a crew that was working constantly on the tracks. He was actually killed in a train accident. How it happened, I don't know, but he was knocked over and killed.

So his oldest son, James T. Powers, became the head of the family. Jimmy Powers was very active in the town of Norwalk as a Democrat--I think he was the councilman, and then I believe for a while he was mayor, probably a two-year term or something like that. He quite looked-up to. It was a very Irish community. He was a conductor on the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad.

He, Jimmy, really ran the family in a funny way. They had a family home at 6 Valley Place and they'd had it for absolutely years and years and years. It's where my mother grew up, and her brothers and sisters. I'm not quite sure of the number of brothers and sisters she had. Mother described a brother whom she apparently loved very much who was extremely handsome but very unlike the others in the family. He was dark, olive-skinned--

Bill: Black Irish.

Bonnie: Black Irish. Mother's fantasy about that was that the Armada sank off the coast of Ireland, and a lot of the sailors got into Ireland and actually intermarried. Mother held a thesis that every other generation there was one boy that looked very Basque. They were mostly Basque, apparently. He had the temperament--I think there was a bit of romanticizing here, but nevertheless, they enjoyed it.

Bill: What was your mother's name?

Bonnie: My mother's name was Josephine Earle Powers. She had a sister, Kate, who was the oldest, next to Jimmy. She might have been even older, but he was the oldest son. Kate didn't marry until she was fifty, she ran the house. She made a cake every day for Jimmy, a fresh cake. He had a teacup that was so big, it was like a half-gallon. He had tea, boiled tea--you know, they kept a pot of tea boiling on the stove--he had tea and cake when he came in. It was his tea-time sort of thing, but he could have it at eleven in the morning, too.

At fifty, Aunt Kate married Freddy St. John, Frederick St. John. Frederick St. John was a family friend, and his first wife was Kate's best friend. So they had done lots of things together as young women. Freddy had married this friend, and he had two

sons by her. But she was killed crossing a road, probably in her early fifties or late forties, and he was quite devastated by this. His sons were already grown up. He was a very fine builder and his sons became very well known builders. They really developed quite a big business and became fairly wealthy men.

He was lonely, and he knew Kate, and they married. My impression is that these marriages had a lot to do with being taken care of, by the men, so she had a double job now. She had a head-of-the-family brother who made his demands, and this husband who ultimately came to live in this house with her. They started out in a little house by themselves, and she was quite fond of this little house--I've seen pictures of it--but Jimmy was powerful and needed a family around him, and so she moved in.

Both these men smoked, and they would sit in the kitchen--they smoked pipes--and they would sit in the kitchen, and it was astonishing to me, they never talked. And then somebody would go, "Harumph," and [laughs] that was the beginning of a sentence about something in town, or something like that. They would have tea and their cake.

I remember laughing at Aunt Kate's power, however, because she was a bit of the steel hand in a velvet glove--at times only. She hated limburger cheese, and my uncle loved limburger cheese, so they were going to have their limburger cheese. But she only allowed him to keep it in a covered jar out on a rock in the yard. If he wanted his limburger, he had to go get it and bring it in.

Bill: Was this Jimmy, or was this her husband?

Bonnie: This was Jimmy. Fred was a very shy man. He made no demands at all. He went on building, more carpentry than being a real builder. His sons were builders. I think they tried to get him into their business, but he liked his independence. Besides, the sons resented his marrying "beneath him," I think. By this time they were monied, and the Powers were not St. Johns. So they weren't nice to their father or to Kate or to the Powers family.

Then there was Aunt Fran, who was the youngest daughter. She never married, nor did Jimmy ever marry. I think Aunt Fran would have been absolutely knocked over if somebody asked for her hand. She worked in a handkerchief factory in town. All these New England towns had specialized things they did. Danbury was famous for hats, and there was real prestige. The handkerchief factory was zilch compared to being in the hat factory. Danbury was famous for its hats. And there were watch towns and so on--it was really quite wonderful. There are famous towns for watches, clocks, and so on.

Mother's Spirit: Swimming Into Society

Bonnie: So Mother grew up in this family. Mother was always trying to get her sisters to sort of get out of this trap of domination by her brother. And much as she loved him, she fought with him all the time. She was always strong-headed. And apparently that had been so in her growing up. She was very handsome. She had auburn hair, long hair, and she was tall and slender. I have some really beautiful pictures of her graduation in a dress not unlike your wedding dress.

Bill: Graduation from--?

Bonnie: She graduated from high school and then from teacher's college.

One story I remember I love about my mother. She was a good athlete, and there was a boyish quality about her. She had a big stride, and she was very free physically. She was invited--she was the other side of the tracks really, but she went to school in probably the public high school, maybe the teachers' college, I don't know, and I'm not quite sure whether the teachers' college was in Norwalk or in some town nearby--she was invited to a very fancy party by a girl who was of a wealthy family, and if you lived on the shore and had one of these big houses on the shore, you were really in the posh group.

And this was a swimming party. In those days they had big swimming rafts, but unlike our bare rafts, they'd have a canopy over them, and chairs, and servants would have set up a buffet and so on, and they were very large, and steps on the sides. Mother, who was really slim, wanted to make an impression, because there was a count who was the houseguest. This was what all the excitement was about, was to meet a count.

Now, this was a time historically when wealthy American families from all over, less from the Far West than from Chicago and East, did not want their girls to go to college. They saw no reason for them to have an education beyond high school really, and they sent them to finishing schools. That's what they were called. They were usually two-year schools. Some of them have since become really good women's colleges, but they started off as finishing schools.

The girls had subjects like French and literature, et cetera, and piano, and art classes, and all the lady sort of arts. And mostly it was about preparing them for marriage. Then they finished their finishing school by their families taking them to

Europe, because you got your final polish by knowing Paris and London and--

Bill: The Grand Tour.

Bonnie: The Grand Tour sort of thing, and you went with your mother or your aunt or something like that. The family always hoped that they married very wealthy men in Europe, but they always wanted to have royalty, duke or marquis or whatever it was. There was great excitement all the time about this, and it was what hit the newspapers, of course, and got social column stuff.

Well, Mother thought that she wasn't going to make any kind of an impression if she arrived on time. They had cabanas around on the beach and she had a bathing suit that was rather pretty. It had long bloomers, to the knee, and you wore stockings underneath it, and little slippers, sort of rubberized things, I think. It had a kind of neckline with a ruffle, and a little bit low-cut.

Mother's bosom was very flat, and she didn't like that, because this was made with a fullness that was attractive. You were supposed to be hourglass-shaped. Mother didn't fill out in the right spots, she was too boyish. So she borrowed what were called "plumpers" from a friend of hers, and they were made of India rubber, which is a reddish color. You blew them up, and you put them inside your bra in the suit. That gave you some figure.

Mother didn't know you were supposed to anchor them, so she stuck them in her suit--[laughter] you can see it coming, right. She was a very good swimmer, and many girls weren't very good swimmers. So she went into the water a little late, and she swam luxurious strokes, showing off her skills, and hoped the count would help her up out of the water. And indeed he did.

He came to the steps and took her hand. And then she saw his eyes go like saucers [laughter] as two tumors rose out of her chest. I said to Mother, "What did you do?" She said, "I ducked down into the water." She apparently got rid of them and came up. I think she was a bit flattened by this little experience.

Bill: In more ways than one.

Bonnie: [laughs] Right.

She was very bright in school. I actually think that chemistry was her hot subject at that time. She was selected from the teachers' college to be part of a training program set up by

Nicholas Murray Butler, who was head of Columbia, and another man whose name I've forgotten--.

Bill: Bonnie, we talked about some of this last night. I wondered, was your mother picked out of college for this, or was she already teaching?

Bonnie: As far as I know she was picked out, or recommended--I have no idea quite how, whether you applied or what.

Bill: But she was in college when she was selected?

Bonnie: She had just finished what was called teachers' college. I don't think it was four years; I have a suspicion it was like three or two, something like that. Because all the states had teacher training colleges.

More on Family and Relations

Bill: Was she the only one in the family who went to college of her sisters?

Bonnie: As far as I know, she was the only one who went to college.

Bill: How about the brothers?

Bonnie: I don't think any of them did. The one I spoke about, who was Basque-like, died very early. I believe there was another sister whom I never heard about. If Mother mentioned it, it didn't stick.

I think she did actually talk about a sister she had who went to New York to work, and whom she thought was very beautiful, who was older than she was. But I think she had a breakdown and either was manic-depressive or schizophrenic or whatever it was, but she was institutionalized. And I never knew about her. It was kept in those days totally secret. She was in a state institution the rest of her life, and she lived a very long time. Apparently, Aunt Kate went to visit her once a month or so, but they never talked about it. It was like a blot.

Bill: So most of the family stayed in Norwalk.

Bonnie: They stayed right at 6 Valley Place, until many years later, when I was living in New York, and they had to--that's after I married Ralph--they had to sell 6 Valley Place because of the big New England Thruway coming through. It came right past their house and chewed it up. They didn't want to sell, but they had to, and

they found a house really right across the thruway on a street that was very familiar to them. But by that time Uncle Jimmy had died, and Aunt Kate had died, and Aunt Fran was taking care of Freddy. They lived in this house.

Bill: Did your mother talk much about the family?

Bonnie: She talked about her brothers and sisters with a great deal of affection--not the ones that were dead; the ones that were alive. She used to rant about her brother Jimmy because he was such a power guy.

Bill: A bit of a tyrant.

Bonnie: A bit of a tyrant in his own way, but like many, many heads of Irish families. After all, he was being responsible for his family. But they had to toe the line.

Poor Aunt Fran never married. Jimmy died, and then not too long after that Kate died, and that's while the house was still in negotiation with the New England Thruway Commission or whatever and they knew they were going to have to sell. It was a very pretty house. It was on a sort of point of land. A road came this way and a road came this way, and there were trees, and it was a wooden house with a back porch and a front porch and that sort of thing.

Bill: Did your mother tell you lots of stories about her family before that trip when you first met them?

Bonnie: My mother told me very few stories about her family. The only think I can think is that Mother felt that her family was much lower class than my father's family, where there were a lot of educated members of the family.

Bill: Yet it was important for her to take you and your brothers back for that three-month period.

Bonnie: She had a loyalty to her family. They were all Catholics, and she had a great loyalty to her family. But I think she always wanted to put a little fire under them, to get them to be more interesting in some way.

Aunt Fran was a dear person, and must have been very pretty when she was young. She worked steadily; I think she was an accountant in the hanky place. She loved it when I would come to visit. This was much later, when I'd gone to New York to study at the Neighborhood Playhouse in 1930 or so.

I think in a way having the family back there was the only reason Mother really was able to beat off my father when I got the scholarship, in arguing with him that I should go. He thought I was too young, too naive, couldn't stand the big city. He was terrified at the idea of my going, but he'd already gone bankrupt.

My mother said, "You're not even able to send her to the university, she doesn't want to go there anyway, and she has a known talent." I had been asked by Martha Graham to join her company, but Martha thought I was too young, and she wanted all of her dancers to go to the Neighborhood Playhouse where she taught and Louis taught, and be better prepared to go into her company. We didn't get paid anyway, so this was--she helped me to get this scholarship.

But Mother allowed me to go and encouraged me to go, I think, because she knew I had an escape valve to her family, and it was only an hour out of town. I would go home to 6 Valley Place once a month at least, usually with a huge bag of laundry, and very tired, and I loved being taken care of and fed cake and all kinds of things. Dorothy Bird, who had come from Victoria and had gone to New York a year ahead of me because she was two years older would come with me. She was a person I shared an apartment with, and we became very close friends.

Bill: Was she a relative?

Bonnie: No. Same name, but not a relative. Our families became close friends, and her brothers were very close to me. She had four brothers, and she was the only girl.

Dorothy and I went there weekends, and we'd have a lovely time. Sometimes we would take friends of ours. One was a very close friend of Dorothy's who became that remarkable doctor in public health who blew the whistle on thalidomide. I can't remember her name, but she was a fantastic woman doctor, and she exposed this whole thing of thalidomide and saved women untold deformed babies. She really had to battle. She would come with us, and various friends, and they were always very generous. The house was quite big, so this was easy to do.

I would adore teasing my Aunt Fran, because they were so full of funny prejudices. I would tell her I had a Chinese boyfriend-- [laughter] and just send her into an absolutely tailspin. I was like my mother, I think, trying to be provocative, to get them to accept something different than this kind of narrow perspective on what was good and right and so on.

I remember [laughs] that the Callahan relatives often came and stayed. There were quite a few bedrooms, and as a consequence you could always put up somebody. I remember when we arrived that time when I was about eleven, to stay, I had to share a bed with my Great Aunt Kate, the aunt of my Aunt Kate, another one of the sisters of my mother's mother. She was a little tiny lady wearing bombazine, you know, that black rustly fabric, and a little high collar. She was very old-fashioned and very correct, and not married. Lots of Irish women never got married.

She had to sleep with me and she complained bitterly about this. She was sort of a self-indulgent person in a lot of ways. She complained because I walked up and down her back all night. [laughter] Which I probably did. She was trying to get me thrown out of her room. There wasn't much else, other places.

Religious Instruction, and the Contrast between Seattle and Norwalk

Bonnie: I remember being very distressed, though, by the fact that cousins kept coming around to see my mother, and many of the young men were Jesuit priests. These were second cousins, third cousins. They always wanted to bless me, because I was coming to the age of enlightenment or something.

Heidi: Confirmation.

Bonnie: I hadn't yet been confirmed.

Bill: Puberty, more likely.

Bonnie: Puberty is right. But the blessings always had to take place in some quiet place. Well, in this household it was hard to find anything quiet except a closet under the stairs where all the boots and the winter clothes and stuff were kept. So I would be kneeling in this closet among smelly old rubber boots, being blessed, and given a little rosary which I must never--. I remember I was so intimidated, I had a tiny rosary and a tiny little plastic windup {?}--

[end tape 2, side A]

[begin tape 2, side B]

Bonnie: Anyway, I carried this rosary that I was given for years, and wrapped it up, bandaged it, so it wouldn't fall apart.

Bill: But this would be happening closeted under the stairs? That sounds very scary.

Bonnie: Well, there was a slightly sexy implication to the thing, but I was very little. There was nothing--I mean, it was all meant well. He was so used to being in one of those confessional booths that it didn't make any difference, you could just--it was little and small and so on. It had a window, fortunately, so there was a little light, it wasn't totally dark.

Heidi: This happened more than once, or just this one time?

Bonnie: It was only that one time. The other times, I would get different kinds of anointing, and this sort of thing [making the sign of the cross] in front of you. But it was all part of their game.

Bill: Were you religious at that time? Did you go to Sunday school?

Bonnie: Oh, I went to Sunday school. My father would drive us to Sunday school.

Heidi: Catholic, then.

Bonnie: To the Catholic Sunday school, and then he would go and wait, or go to his office, and come back and pick us up. He was not a Catholic, and my mother was. So we went to church there too.

But one of the fun things that happened was that I could ride the horses. I had been going horseback riding from the time I was about seven, learning English-style riding. And a circus came to town. This must have been in early part of the--when we were there before we went to school. Circuses in those days, these little one-tent circuses--.

Actually, this wasn't a circus, this was a play, and the play was "Uncle Tom's Cabin." They had a big parade, all the cast and anybody else from town that wanted to join. They had costumes and they had horses--they probably rented them locally--and I got to ride a horse in the parade. That was really thrilling, to ride the horse in the parade.

Then we got a free ticket to see "Uncle Tom's Cabin," which was a little touring company of some kind. I can't remember much except that I loved the idea of Eliza crossing the ice, hopping from plastic-looking icebergs to cross the ice. I remember little of the story, but that was probably one of the earliest plays I ever saw.

I don't remember anything about school, going to school, but I did.

Heidi: It must have been in the fall?

Bonnie: It was in the fall.

Heidi: Do you know what grade about you would have been?

Bonnie: Fourth? Fifth? Something like that. Maybe fifth or sixth. I don't remember it at all. It didn't make a big impression on me. I think I remember where the school was. I remember that it was a very typically New England square building with a central hall and then several floors, and fairly big classrooms with desks in rows.

Bill: Did it feel very different to come from Washington to Connecticut at that time, different attitudes?

Bonnie: At that time we lived in the city, so it was fun to live in another kind of city in a different kind of house. Because we lived in a very small bungalow in the Madrona District, but we could walk to a swimming beach from the little cottage-kind of house. It still exists, and I drove Heidi by it one time. It had a flight of stairs in front of it.

Brother Bill's Broken Teeth

Bonnie: I had a reputation for a rather terrible temper. When we were living in the Madrona District my brother Bill, who is now six feet two or more, was very small. He was very frail, a skinny little kid. He was pugnacious, and he got himself into some pickles with kids in the neighborhood. If he was being hassled, I would take on anybody in the neighborhood. I was strong, and I could beat them up, and I did. So I had a reputation, but I also beat up on my brother. [laughs] I had him pretty well intimidated for a while.

This empty lot, which we had sort of loved because it was our woods, and it had great trees on it, it was across from the little bungalow that we lived in. So we had sort of built little shacks and things in it. And then they came along and knocked it all down and started to build houses. These big wooden frame houses were going up. There was sort of a little alleyway, I guess, or something, but I remember somebody running to me that Bill had fallen out of the top of one of these buildings and was sitting in a sandpile. They were scared stiff. I knew my brother was not supposed to be climbing around in that building.

I ran down, and I noticed that his front teeth had been knocked out. So what did I do? I scrabbled in the sand looking for the teeth, because I thought if I stuck them back, Mother wouldn't notice. He was just groggy and sitting there, alive. He'd fallen in the sandpile, which was lucky. But he'd opened his

mouth yelling coming down, hit on the edge of a piece of scaffolding or something. Just the teeth. That must have been some yell.

I ran back to the house when I couldn't find the teeth, and I ran up the stairs, and I ran into the kitchen--I was scared to tell my mother, and I kept running in the bathroom and running out and running to the bathroom--[laughter]. I was so terrified. Finally I said something--it was probably a second--and I told my mother, and she went galloping down, of course, and picked up Bill and brought him back to the house, and got the doctor. Didn't worry about the teeth at all! And he wasn't hurt. How he survived, I don't know.

Later, I had a--well, this is when the Indian boy lived with us, so I must have been close to nine. This was the time when we were going over to live in Bainbridge Island in the summer. I had a scooter, but the front had separated from the back somehow or other, bolts had fallen off. So I left it for Edward Henry to fix, he said he would fix it. Well, what he did was tie it with some red string and leaned it against--to keep it from falling over, I guess, he just tied it into place.

I didn't know it wasn't fixed, so I took it down on the street, and I started going down a little hill. It was a sort of slopey place. Going around the corner on my way to the drugstore I must have hit a little pebble or something, and it jerked the front wheel, and I went flying over and lit on my face, took all the skin off one side of my face, and I chipped the front tooth!

A man standing in the window shaving--this must have been a Saturday or something, a bright, sunny day--he saw this happen. And unshaven, foam all over his face--he would have scared any kid--he came dashing down, picked me up, because I was very bloody, and carried me home. I guess I was able to tell him where I lived or something. Or everybody else did.

So Mother got a doctor again, and they started putting unguentine on my face to not have the skin dry up and all that stuff. It was superficial; I still have a tiny scar from the cut that happened in the lip, but it didn't take away a scar here that I had had when I was four or something, when I had pulled a desk over on top of me.

So the doctor went away, said he thought I'd survive, and Mother was gently combing my hair, which had gotten very messy, and she felt my head and found a huge soft spot in the head. She called the doctor--we had a family doctor, I think his name was Dr. Stone. Mother said, "There's something wrong with her head."

He said, "Oh, yes, she's had a concussion, but don't worry about it. [laughter] It will stabilize itself." He wasn't upset about it at all. Well, it did. I just to be kept quiet.

Parties: Sixth Birthday, and a Treasure Hunt

Bonnie: Another interesting thing about my mother was that she was wonderfully imaginative. She devoted herself to taking care of us--I think I told you that she lost her job as a teacher. I was about six, I guess, and just going to school, and I was dying to have a birthday party. I was invited to birthday parties, and I thought that was the greatest thing in the world, a birthday party.

So without telling my mother, and only vaguely related to my birthday, I invited formally, by word of mouth, of course, all my girlfriends, and a couple of boys too, to a birthday party. It was only by accident my mother learned about it on the morning of the party, because she was telephoned about what time by another parent. Well, my mother was wonderful. She just snapped to it, and she created the most imaginative birthday party any little kid had.

When the children arrived, each child was given--I don't know, a colored something like a little roll, and a colored matching string. The whole house was networked with these different colored strings tied to pieces of furniture and so on, so that the first twenty minutes, every child was following their string, rolling it up, crawling in and out--it's a great idea--until they got to a present, which was their first present that they had. I don't remember too much else about the games that were played and stuff, but Mother was wonderful, and very imaginative.

And then later, one of the summers when we lived on Bainbridge Island, which my mother adored, she had made the acquaintance of several of the university people and learned of what had been originally an Indian longhouse facing Seattle, and just between Port Blakely and a place called Creosote, because there was a creosoting factory there. They had a long pier that went out, and the little boat called "Steamer Speeder" {} would bring people back and forth across the Sound. But a big ferry boat went into Port Blakely.

You could only get to this house--and there were other summer houses along the beach--by either coming by boat or walking through a forest for about three-quarters of an hour, or less than that probably. Maybe twenty minutes or so, a boardwalk that went

through this beautiful primeval sort of forest, marvelous huge trees.

The longhouse had been turned into a summer house by the first president of the university, or the second or third, someplace along the line. The Indians had left, and there was this big center room. It had been added to, and there was a big porch, and a huge absolutely wonderful fireplace, and a big living room at the front, and there were lots of windows across the front. It had a large dining area and a kitchen beyond that, and beyond the kitchen was a cabin, a very nice cabin, and that's where Edward Henry lived. He had his own cabin, and he adored it. He had it filled with dried starfish and all kinds of things he found in the woods and stuff.

Heidi: How much older was he than you?

Bonnie: He was probably about nineteen, twenty maybe. And I was nine I think, at about that time. And studying ballet, and absolutely adoring my teacher, Caird Leslie.

Mother, during the summer, decided she would give a party for me and Scott, who was just two, I think--so this is all in the time when we were going to change our house, but we were still living in Madrona District--and my brother Bill. She planned the whole thing so magnificently. It was a pirate's party for all my friends and my brothers' friends and the children that lived along the beach here.

When the parents arrived the parents had their own sort of a partial party, and then we children, she had made costumes, so we had little pirates' outfits and patches for our eyes, and little rubber daggers, all kinds of things to make us look very piratey. Then at some point my father said, "Look at that strange bottle out there bobbing in." (We were always looking for things coming, treasures from the Far East and so on, because there were lots of the beautiful glass balls that were used in fishnets in Japan that would take years, but would float across the Pacific.)

So we all clambered into the water--we were bare-legged and bare-footed--it was a rocky beach, but we were so used to walking on it that we didn't mind walking on barnacles and everything else, I don't know how we did it. And we retrieved the bottle, which my father of course had planted, and we opened it, and there was a half-burnt map, and we read the map with great excitement, with help of translation of certain things from my father, and it told us that there was hidden treasure, but that we had to follow the map to find each new piece of the map.

I think the first thing we had to do was to go to a rocky little cairn that was sticking up in the water and search around on it for another clue. I don't remember what it was, but it was something that we found. That led us to Port Blakely, which was quite a distance away, to a wooden boat that had keeled over and rotted. We had to climb on this slimy thing--Dad didn't make it easy for us!--and climb inside and look around, slipping and sliding. We were getting to be messes, and looking more and more like real pirates all the time.

We found--I don't remember what it was, a bottle or something else. Anyway, we found the next clue, and then that took us back toward our house, along the beach. We would find a certain rock and so on and so forth, and this led us into the woods. The treasure was back in the woods, buried.

Suddenly our parents, whom we didn't recognize because they had bandannas and everything--Mother made costumes for the adults, and they were all dressed as pirates--jumped out at us and were protecting the treasure, and we had to battle with them with our rubber daggers and get rid of them, so they went screaming off through the woods and stuff.

We unburied the treasure, which was in a beautiful box that she had covered, I don't know with what, but it made it look very old, and when we opened it up, it was the most enchanting collection of necklaces and bracelets and things, all made of candy, strung. She'd found little beautiful bright-colored square candies, not hard but had a kind of marshmallow middle or something, and she'd strung them. There were all kinds of things like this, enough for all the children. So that was the end of this party. And then, of course, there was a party on the beach, and the parents had their party, and so on. It was wonderful.

That night Caird Leslie, my teacher, was sleeping at our house. His mother had come, and she was a friend of my mother's. I had a big bed in my own room, and he had a bedroom not far from me, and I hoped he'd make a mistake and see what a good student I was, and I slept in an arabesque. [laughter]

Bill: Holding position.

Bonnie: Holding position all night. I remember going to sleep in this arabesque. Oh, that was really funny.

Parties: A Circus, and a Paper Chase

Bonnie: Mother had a lot of imagination like that. Later, when we lived on Robin Hill, Mother gave a variety of parties. Sometimes they were fundraising for the Catholic church, sometimes they were just parties that she gave. And one--she discovered there was a circus in residence, spending the winter in Kirkland, a little one-ring circus. So she hired the circus to bring as many acts as they could into our living room, and they created a one-ring circus, and they brought the horses and things in--we had a big porch and a library and you came through the library into the living room. It was quite a big living room.

They put down canvas and sawdust and the ring, and they did a lot of the different acts--they were delighted to be employed. They brought the tiniest horses, maybe one or two, I don't know. Because our horses, if you left the front door open and the horses were in the orchard, were always wandering in the house. I'd hear little stamp-stamps, and go find my brother's horse, which was tiny, looking all around, coming in on the Oriental rugs, and lead him out. The bigger ones were scared because the doors were too small for them.

But it was a great party. I was, of course, supposedly upstairs, and mostly just peeking. Oh, they had a number of parties. I remember that the priests, when it was a Catholic party, adored coming, because my father was a good storyteller. He told slightly off-color jokes, and they would go into his library, which was just off the big library, sort of his office, home library, and listen to him until twelve o'clock. Twelve o'clock, because it was always a Saturday night, they stopped. No drinking, nothing, they prepared for Sunday. Those parties were quite fun, and I was a little older then, so I was allowed to help.

Then Mother decided to give a paper chase. It was a beautiful weekend. She had invited probably thirty or forty people to come on horseback. There were lots and lots of people who rode around there, and had their own horses. They would be part of the paper chase, and it was a breakfast paper chase.

Heidi: How old were you at this point?

Bonnie: Oh, I must have been thirteen, fourteen. Mother and Dad, with great bags of paper, chopped up, rode out early in the morning, and they created the paper chase path. You drop paper, and then you keep leading people off paths. There's only one--it's a maze sort of thing. And finally, there's something at the end--I didn't ride in the paper chase, because I had to help cook.

People began to arrive and Mother, who had prepared a huge breakfast, which was to be out under the trees--she had big picnic tables, we had a chestnut grove and a little cottage, as well as the big house, and so these tables were laden with stuff, hams and all kinds of stuff--Mother watched people coming into the yard--they'd heard about it from a friend, so they just came along.

A few people brought a pail of paella or a pail of something else, so there was some additional food. But I remember Mother saying to me, "It looks like there are going to be too many people. Go into"--. She had a private refrigerator you could walk in, and my father's hunting deer, et cetera, whatever, got hung there. It was a cold storage, it wasn't a freezer, so you hung meat until Mother said it was faisander, which meant you scraped mold off it, and then it was properly seasoned. She said, "Go get a ham and put it in the oven." We had to cook some more.

It was a wonderful party, absolutely marvelous, and I remember that a whole contingent of Russians arrived. They were the Galitzen family, who had escaped from Moscow or thereabouts. They were a wealthy family. The Galitzen name comes up every once in a while. They had arrived in Seattle by way of Harbin, China, I think, north China, and had gotten jobs and things and so on. But they loved anything that felt like what they used to do in Russia.

I had never seen riding boots like theirs. They fit their legs like gloves, and you laced them all the way up on the outside so they'd fit really close. And the men were skinny and, I thought, awfully ugly, mostly hawkish, and the women were rather arrogant and so on. Not many of the women rode, but the men did. And they had a terrible way, when two people were riding beside each other in conversation, to go right through the middle.

They were so arrogant! They were just full of these princely manners that were ugly. And they arrived, a band of them. Mother was terribly amused. There was Prince Galitzen and this and that. By this time, my mother had become very Democratic, after her encounter with the count, and not much interested in snooty people like this. But it was a great party. So she did these kinds of things.

Mother Takes on the Town: PTA and Community Action

Bonnie: The other thing that was interesting about my mother was that she became very active in the PTA, when my brothers were going to school in Bothell. She began to look into the relationships between the superintendent of schools and the people teaching in the junior high school, high school, and elementary school. She

found that there were forty-five members of the faculty or administration related to the superintendent.

Heidi: Supernepotism.

Bonnie: It was supernepotism. So she decided there was only one way to deal with this, and that was to organize the women. She discovered that the board of trustees for the school were all businessmen in town, and they all appointed each other. They were the banker and this and that and so on, and they no doubt got little cuts on commissions and so on for the school. There was no registered nurse, which for a school of this size there should have been.

She felt that the thing she had to do was to organize the women, so she started driving out to every farm, and there were plenty of them around, and discovering that these women never got off the farms, because there was only one car. They were all poor, or some were poorer than others. So she organized trucks and various women that could help to bring the women in town to vote.

Then they got a man to run for the school board. It was school board, not trustees. He was a kind of Casper Milquetoast, I think, character, but nevertheless, he was a male and he would run and listen to the women. He was pretty opposed, I guess, to the behavior of this school board, probably for his own children. I don't remember.

She brought the women in, she even did their shopping for them. I can remember her being so annoyed because they were complaining about the quality of paper in Sears Roebuck catalogues because they used them in their outhouses. [laughter] That sort of thing.

Well, they won, they got this man on the school board, and they began, the businessmen in town, began to be very aware of Mother. She discovered that the fire engine in the town was an old Marmon car somebody had given. Marmon cars were nine-passenger cars, and in the early twenties my father had one, which I released the brake of when I was about four and started down a hill, and my father got on the car fast and stopped it, because I would have smashed pretty well.

Anyway, they had rigged it up with ordinary ladders and a garden hose, essentially--there were a few fire hydrants in the city, but they didn't have very much fire hose. It was parked in a garage at the end of this town street, which was only about a block long, and the firemen's hats all hung on pegs, and the white

hat was for the chief, and the red hats for the guys. And there was one telephone operator, and we had crank phones!

[end tape 2, side B]

[begin tape 3, side A]

Bonnie: Anyway, she decided that this was no kind of a fire engine to have, but she didn't do anything about it until we had a fire--

Bill: At your house?

Bonnie: At our house. Mother went outside, because she felt that the chimney going through the house was awfully hot, and she was perturbed by this. She went outside and discovered there were sparks flying out of the chimney. Obviously it needed to be cleaned, so it was catching on fire from its own charcoal and stuff that had gone up the flue. So she went in and cranked the phone and said to the operator that there was a fire in her chimney and she was really worried about it, because sparks were falling on the roof.

The woman was very hesitant. She said, "Are you sure it's on fire? Why don't you go out and look again?" Well, Mother went out and looked, and indeed the fire had subsided. She'd turned off the furnace--I think we had an oil furnace at this time.

But it puzzled her why this woman was hesitating so. That's when she started to investigate. She discovered that they knew that the length of hose from the hydrant at the foot of our orchard would never reach the house, and they were stalling. The motto for our fire department was, "We've never saved a house, but we've never lost a lot." [laughter]

Bill: Terrific!

Bonnie: It was the kind of thing--and there were four roads out of town--when you heard the fire department bells go off you knew whether it was north, east, south, or west, so you hopped in your own car, if you weren't part of the engine going, and you dashed down the road and eventually came to where the fire was. So everybody would pitch in with a bucket brigade and stuff like this.

Mother was appalled by this. So she began to watch small-town newspapers from all over Washington--by this time, she was very active in the PTA throughout the state--and she discovered that there was a quite good fire engine for sale in a slightly bigger town in eastern Washington. She went over and bought it and got it back--I don't know whether she drove it, I doubt it,

but I wouldn't put it past her to do so because by this time she was a pretty aggressive driver.

Bill: Did she give it to the town as a gift?

Bonnie: She made them buy it. She intimidated them into buying it, because she had a certain power now with the women and they were telling their husbands what they wanted for their children and so on. They tried to make her mayor, but she soon discovered that the mayor also was the dog-catcher and in charge of the garbage collection or something. She recognized immediately this was no honorary position, this was a way to kiss you off, so she wouldn't take it.

But she continued, as long as she was in Bothell, to keep lighting fires. When she discovered there was no registered nurse she went into Seattle and she hired a registered nurse, and she came back with the signed contract, which she'd made up, but she knew what to make up, and she went to the superintendent--she knew of his nepotism--and said, "Here's your registered nurse. By law, you're supposed to have this." And they had her. [laughs] She did these kinds of things.

Interview 3: July 28, 1994
[continuing tape 3, side A]

Father's Family, and the Mormon Handcart Trek

Bill: This is July 28, our third recording session, and we're recording at eight in the evening. Bonnie, how about starting with your father. What was his name and where was he born?

Bonnie: His name was Scott Elliot Bird. He was named Scott Elliot, at least the Elliot part, for--I believe Scott Elliot was the name of a very good friend of his father's. At one time I had a picture, and I probably still have it, of Scott Elliot, but I don't know which picture it is. My dad was born in Salt Lake, I can't tell you the year at the moment. He was, I believe, the next to the last child of William Harold Bird, his father.

His mother was--I can't remember her first name at the moment, and I think I'd be making it up if I tried. I know her oldest sister's name better than I know hers--at the moment.

Heidi: What was her oldest sister's name?

Bonnie: Laura.

Bill: That would have been your father's aunt, Laura?

Bonnie: Yes, that's right, because it was my grandmother's sister, who had also been born in Salt Lake. His father--it was a second marriage for his father.

I think I've actually got it on tape someplace earlier, that his father was sent by the government to try to keep the Mormons from seceding. He succeeded in this, apparently, and decided to establish a practice--I think he actually established a practice, and one of his clients was the railroad, which he had been working for.

Bill: Was he a lawyer?

Bonnie: He was a lawyer. And he came from Wilmington, Delaware. My Aunt Grace [Bird] did a very good genealogy of the family, better than I can remember it, so there's no need to do all that.

Dad grew up in Salt Lake, went to, as far as I know, an Episcopal school also, which his mother had gone to. His father had been married, the first marriage, in the East, and when he decided to settle in Salt Lake--he has great admiration for this

sort of industriousness of the Mormons, he came to respect them a great deal--he went back East and got his wife and the two sons he had--one's name was Sherwood, I can't remember the other one's name--and brought them out.

His wife was probably very frail and lonely, that's just my guess, living so far away from her own family, and she died. And he had these two boys to bring up. I think he had a fairly well-established house. I've seen pictures of it, it was really quite a lovely house. I don't know whether that's the original one he lived in.

I have minute descriptions of the wedding of Aunt Fanny, because Heidi wore Aunt Fanny's dress for her wedding, and there were newspaper descriptions of it as well, and it's quite fascinating to read the descriptions. All her friends decorated the house with flowers, and one of the things I remember that enchanted me was they decorated the stair balustrade entirely in yellow roses, and rooms had themes and so on. The reason she was married at home was that her father was already ill and was not expected to live, and didn't live many months beyond the marriage.

Bill: Was Fanny your father's sister?

Bonnie: My father's oldest sister. So I think this was the first marriage. She married Edward Sterling, who came from a Mormon background also, and he worked in a bank. This is Ginny's father, Virginia Rothwell's father.

My father I think very much enjoyed his boyhood in Salt Lake, and his grandmother was homesteading in American Forks, south of Salt Lake, so he would go to spend his summers on this ranch that she ran.

Bill: Who ran the ranch?

Bonnie: My great-grandmother, Hannah Lapish.

Bill: Your father's mother's side?

Bonnie: My father's mother's side, that's right.

Heidi: And she was Mormon?

Bonnie: She was a Mormon. Didn't I tell you this story?

Bill: No.

Bonnie: Oh, well, then I'll start back. Who did I tell it to? She was born in Leeds, England, and married her husband--she was very small. Her husband was very small. They were very young, and they married, and they were totally taken in by a proselytizing Latter-Day Saint representative. England was very sensitive to this whole Latter-Day Saints proselytizing.

Bill: Sensitive as in many people were converted?

Bonnie: Very interested in it. Because it represented for them the new land, and there was a lot of interest in the whole thing of America. If I knew the political time, there might have been good political reasons for it too.

So they got a call from Brigham--he always called all the ones that became members of the church--to come. At that time, he needed a great following, because he had decided that they must find the promised land. He was planning the first caravan to find the promised land. They were going West. They'd been badly prosecuted in New York and all the way. They kept moving West trying to find a place, and they were always hassled.

And it's partly, I suppose, because there were so many women. At that time, post-Civil War, there were so many widows raising children, unable to get jobs, and the churches were the only places they found havens of any kind. There were no social services to speak of, except what they organized themselves, I suppose. So many religions, the Shakers, all kinds of religions, really prospered in this period.

So she and her husband heard the call and decided to go to Brigham and join the caravan which was planned. They got to Virginia, if I remember correctly, but I may be wrong, and somehow or other they got then to Nauvoo, Illinois, where the caravan was setting up, and they were late. The caravan had set out.

Now, the biggest amount of money and the biggest amount of supplies went to preparing these covered wagons. But Brigham was aware that other people were coming, and he left messages, and I think he actually sent runners or riders back to encourage people to come. But they hadn't anything to go with, so they made hand carts. They pushed those hand carts three months or more, walking across the U.S.

Bill: The hand carts filled with their clothing and possessions?

Bonnie: Their clothing and--I remember being told that my great-grandmother had a passion for a tiny little potbellied stove, and

that she wasn't going to give that up, and she'd carried it from England. And she had a new baby.

It was a very arduous thing. They took cattle and as much food as they could. I think there many hand-cart groups that came across, more than one, anyway. But they were the first. They had been told, because the promised land had already been found, and that was this Salt Lake area, so they knew the path and the best path, because there were descriptions for them to follow. But nevertheless, between weather and heat and god-knows-what, it was a really grueling kind of thing to do.

They arrived and saw down into the valley, and they were greeted, I think, by people that came up to meet them. There is today a monument to the hand-cart people in Utah, on the road that they followed, which I think now is probably a highway. One thing they had been promised was that there would be shelter for them. Well, when they arrived there wasn't any shelter. My great-grandmother was furious that this wasn't true, and by evening, there was a shelter for her. [laughter]

Indians were very friendly, but they also wanted to be part of this whole group. I remember a story where my grandmother had a new baby, and a big Indian came in to the tent sort of place they were living, and the baby was in a chair, the only chair, probably. He picked the baby up and put it on the floor and sat down in the chair himself, and my grandmother shoved him out of the place with a broom. [laughter] She said, "Indian sit on floor, baby stay in the chair." So she was a feisty little character.

But they prospered in the way that this colony prospered.

Bill: What were their names again?

Bonnie: Hannah Lapish, and I'll have to find his name for you.

They raised their family, but there were funny things that are part of the story. One was that they were awfully opposed to polygamy, and he was--I got the impression my great-grandfather was dominated by my great-grandmother, and that he was a wee bit of a Casper Milquetoast in some respects, probably not in terms of industry or anything. He solved the problem, so to speak, by hearing the call, and therefore volunteering or going out to proselytize. So he would leave for long periods of time.

Bill: To do missionary work?

Bonnie: To do missionary work. So Great-grandmother was raising the family and running the farm--they didn't probably have much of a farm, but a vegetable garden and stuff. And then every time he came home, there was a new child. I don't know exactly how this parses itself out in terms of trips, et cetera, but it was a solution to the polygamy. The pressure was off, because he wasn't there. And she was obviously opposed to the idea.

I think that the pressure must have been such that when she heard that there was homesteading, that the U.S. government was opening up land south of Salt Lake City--this must have been fifteen or so years into their being there, perhaps--she decided that she would homestead. She'd take the children and whatever goods she needed, furniture and so on, and that she would go there. Her husband could come if he wanted, but he didn't have to come.

She apparently homesteaded very successfully, and a little wisely. She didn't choose, I gathered, some obviously fine pieces of land, but when she figured they were going to build a spur railroad right into American Forks--now, whether this was conscious or an accident, I'm not quite sure, but my father thought she was canny about it, because she was right in line where they would logically have put the railroad--she was able ultimately to sell it to the railroad at a fairly good price, because they needed that land, so they met her price.

She raised her kids there. This is where my father, then the son of her daughter, would go for the summers. He adored living in American Forks, and on a farm, because he could ride horses. Apparently, they had what looked like the old-fashioned bakery wagons, that is, with closed--you opened the back door, and then there was just a little seat, covered, and rather protected, I suppose, from weather, that the driver sat in.

He had a friend, and I remember his saying they loved to fool the natives by lying down in the back with the reins going back, so the wagon looked like there was nobody driving it, and then they'd get the horses going, and the horses would tear through town. People would see this wagon with nothing in it and dash out and grab the reins of the horse, and then these boys would pop up and laugh like mad. So there were games of this kind, probably infinitely more stories than I know.

Father's Start in San Francisco and Seattle

Bill: Sounds like that really stuck with your father. I was thinking about your description of the house in Bothell and what that meant to him to recreate that.

Bonnie: Yes, right. Well, the house in Salt Lake all the family remembers as quite a marvelous house, with a big porch around it and big rooms, and many of them. It was a house of some affluence, but apparently the thing that people most remember is that there was always something going on. There were always children playing in the yard, and there was something very jolly and gay about the whole place.

And then, when his father died, he was just getting out of high school, I guess. He had been expected to go to West Point, and his father--you know, you have to be sponsored by a senator. He was sponsored, but with his father's death it turned out that he had not been good with insurance and god-knows-what, there wasn't very much money. So there was no chance of him going.

This must have been about 1906, because the earthquake in San Francisco had just occurred, and they were cleaning up after it. So he decided to get to San Francisco and get a job, at least helping, if he could, find a job helping rebuild the city. Well, his first job he was dishwashing! [laughs] Jobs weren't all that well organized.

He wrote to his mother very regularly, and he wrote and said he had a job pearl-diving, and that was what they called dishwashers, probably on the other side of the slot, I don't know. Market Street was called the slot. His mother sent him some money and said she'd like him to leave that job, it sounded too dangerous. [laughs] He never explained; she thought he was a pearl diver. I know he had one other job which was in a glue factory, and he ran the elevator at first, and then I think he had some other jobs in this glue factory. So he sustained himself in a variety of jobs in San Francisco for a period of time.

Then I can't tell you the gaps, but he moved north to Seattle. Now, if he went to Seattle because of a possibility of a job, I'm not sure. It's very probable that he did, because he must have been twenty-six or -seven or something like that at that point in time. He met up with a group of men who were all really very interesting, and like him, had come from Texas and god-knows-where, all over. One of them was a gold prospector, but he was a mining person. So he was sussing out mining in Canada and in Washington.

Another, Ben Boone, was a cattleman from Texas who had ridden the range for years, but he was a stockbroker too. Really bright

guys, and adventurous. Dad was by this time very interested in automobiles. These men decide--it was too expensive living apart, so they decided to join together and hire a housekeeper, and they got a big house, and they shared this big house. I'm not quite sure, but I believe my father was already in the automobile business at this time, because at this time Ford was establishing agencies. I think they were direct agencies, they were not franchise--I don't know that franchise had even come into existence at that time.

Parents Marriage

Bonnie: So Dad, anyway, was earning a living. I'm not quite sure how he met my mother, but my mother had come to Seattle to be a demonstration teacher at the Seward School. I think she'd been doing this for maybe six months or so before they met, maybe a little longer. She was a ward of the bishop of the diocese of Seattle. Being a Catholic, her family I don't think would have let her go West unless she remained under the care of a Catholic something-or-other, so she lived in the bishop's house. She found it really quite funny, because they were all Irish, apparently--that wasn't new to her--but they were terribly gullible.

I know my mother enjoyed the housekeepers, and being a student, sort of, she was more thrown with the only women, who were all the housekeepers and things. I know that she decided to read tea leaves, and these Irish just adored that and they would save their cups of tea with the dried leaves in them for Mother to read. She didn't know beans about tea-leaf reading, but she'd make up some pretty good stories, and the kinds of stories that would be both encouraging and sort of lead them in good directions, that kind of thing, and little surprises in them. She quite liked this very much.

She made a good many friends, and somehow or other Father and Mother met and fell in love, and decided they would marry. They were a very good-looking couple, from the photographs I've seen. Both were tall and thin and handsome. My mother must have been quite startling, both because she had a sort of boyish, athletic quality to her, and her beautiful auburn hair, and a kind of good sense of humor and a merry quality to her.

Dad and Mother's marriage was the first for these nine or so men who were great friends, and of course, there was a lot of teasing and festivity and so on.

Bill: Was it at all an issue that she was Catholic and he was not?

Bonnie: No.

Heidi: What did the bishop think?

Bonnie: My father was nonreligious. He was trained in--went to school in an Episcopal school, but it wasn't a religious connection. So my father was agnostic as far as I could tell in those early years. But no objection to Mother's being Catholic.

Bill: And the standard agreement that the children would be raised as Catholic?

Bonnie: She couldn't get married in the church--the bishop would have objected heavily--so she was married when the bishop was out of town--this was very typical of my mother--by priests who were very fond of her in a little chapel next to the church.

[end tape 3, side A]

[begin tape 3, side B]

Bonnie: I think almost within a very short time after this, Dad got an agency of his own in Hillsboro, Oregon, just outside of Portland. They moved there. Now, whether Mother was pregnant when they moved, I have no idea, because I'm not quite sure of the time frame.

There is one cute story--Mother was terribly proud of being married, and to Mr. Scott-Elliot Bird, with a hyphen between the Scott and the Elliot, and just thrilled with the whole thing. They had a charge account at Frederick and Nelsons, and probably another store in town, so she went shopping, and she was waiting while the girl made out the bill. She had to tell the girl her name, et cetera, and she said, "Mrs. Scott E. Bird."

And this cute girl behind the counter looked up and said, "Oh, you married the sticky kid?" [laughter] Mother nearly fainted. Turned out that Dad liked candy, and he was remembered amongst all the girls in town, of which there were many, with nine guys in this house, as the sticky kid amongst the girls.

The other amusing thing I remember, which always just killed me because it was so typical of my mother, she bought him some long johns for winter wear in Seattle, and they were too big. So she wished to return them. She'd never, ever done this kind of buying, because she came from a very much poorer background. So she took them in to return them, and she was determined she was going to return them, because she wasn't sure that they'd just take them back easily.

There was a very elegantly-dressed young man standing near a post, and she assumed he was the manager. She waltzed up to him and took out the underwear and shook it in front of him, telling him all this, and he said, "Excuse me, Madam, I'm just waiting for my wife." [laughter] My mother was crushed, embarrassed.

Heidi: Waving underwear at a stranger.

Bonnie: Waving underwear at this poor man. And Frederick and Nelsons was a pretty posh store in those early years.

Father and His Cars and Customers

Bonnie: So they moved to Hillsboro, and they had a house--I've only seen little bits of pictures of this house. Hillsboro was a town, I've never been there, but I gather there were about five valleys that went off into the mountains, and there was this sort of hub that was Hillsboro, where the major shops and the blacksmith and the hardware and so on were, and this new agency.

Nobody had told my father that the roads are impossible in the winter, because they were only roads built for big-wheeled wagons, which tear up the roads during the winter. Cars just sink in them. So Dad had to do other things in the winter as soon as the roads got too bad, which is probably two or three months out of the year. Every man he sold a car to, he had to teach to drive. I have some wonderful pictures of my father looking very elegant in his cars, coupes, really--Model T's.

My father to know and to really love some of the people in this little town, and each valley seemed to have a different tribe. There were moonshiners from Kentucky in one valley. Another had Dutch, ethnic group, and another group had Russian something-or-others in that. There were several. And there was always one phone, a wire, that went up the valley, to the different houses. There weren't a huge number of houses at all. So when the phone rang, everybody picked up the phone along this whole valley, there would be everyone answering, or listening in.

My father, of course, was out trying to sell the cars, and you always went where the farmers were, so he got to know a lot of the farmers, and they got to be very friendly, because Dad enjoyed them so much. I can remember one story that always intrigued me. The revenuers--the Internal Revenue--were always out looking for people who had stills, because they weren't paying revenue for their booze. It was illegal to have stills.

So the people in one of these valleys, I think they were the moonshiners from Kentucky, they were all on the lookout for the Internal Revenue people. And they did have stills. Dad said they built their stills way off in the woods. They would have a working still, but they camouflaged them, and they would watch--there was almost always a little grocery store at the head of each of these valleys. The way you could tell that it was Dutch was because they sold wooden shoes in one, and something else sold something that was native to that particular group.

One day, the revenuers were known to be in the area, and a call went to this moonshine valley to the store to say that the revenuers were on their way. Well, the men had met and plotted what they would do. There was one family that were quite visible. So when the Internal Revenuers, who would creep sort of up the valley, got toward this house, they saw the old man and his son moving out and moving up into the woods, and they were going to follow them, because they knew they were going to the still. So they started their sleuthing.

The men led them all over the hills, and when they got back, their car had been carefully taken apart [laughter], piece by piece. It was all there, but it was in pieces on the road, because you could take a Model T apart very easily. So these were the kinds of games they played.

Another thing that amused me were some of the stories Dad told about his customers. He had one customer that I remember who bought a car, and he had a wooden foot, or a wooden leg--I'm not sure. You had to change gears by feel, and you did it by pushing your clutch, and you could feel first, second, and third gear. There was nothing to handle, so you had to push it down. With a wooden foot, he couldn't feel very well, so he was making mistakes all the time.

Dad taught him to drive and got him pretty aware of how to tell, how to run his foot into {preposition?} his clutch. One day he got a call. The fellow had created a garage for his car in his barn, but he had put his foot down too far on the clutch and he'd gone through the other side of the barn.

Well, these cars were made of steel, so the car could be reassembled without too much banging and getting it back in shape. So Dad came out and got the car, and took it back; and they repaired it. He brought it out to the fellow. Many weeks later, as he was going by, the fellow hailed him to come see how he had solved his problem.

Dad drove in, and the fellow took him up to the barn, opened the barn, went to the other side, opened the other door, and he had a runaround, so if he missed, he always opened both doors, he'd go through and come around again until he got it stopped. [laughter] So that was one of the stories I loved.

Another was of a man whose father was intrigued by the fact that he bought a car, and he wanted to learn how to drive it. But he was very pernickety and embarrassed to be taught by his son. He was a randy little fellow. Apparently, his son said, "I'll teach you how, but you just drive around the farm yard. Don't go out in the roads, because you haven't got a license or anything." So he taught him as best he could.

The son called my father to come out and get the car, because it had four flat tires, and the reason was his father had driven it over a harrow. [laughter] So that was another one of the little handy things.

He had another time when he was driving himself along a road, it was muddy awful weather, and there was a man in a ditch across the road, creating drains or something, and he was bent over exactly the height of the road, and my father drove right over him. He felt a kind of bump, looked in the rear-view mirror, and here's a fellow standing up looking back at the car! [laughter]

Bill: Sounds like something straight out of vaudeville.

Bonnie: Dad went back, and he discovered the man's knees were pretty badly banged, because he'd been shoved down so hard. So he took the man home to his house, which wasn't very far away, and he nursed him. He stopped by every day--the man lived alone--and he dressed the knees, and checked out that he was all right.

Everything was going along fine until one day he went out there, and apparently a lawyer had heard about this. He had called the man and told him he had every right to sue my father, and so on and so forth. So this fellow was very confused. He knew nothing about this kind of thing. But he was beginning to look rather hostilely at my father.

My father happened to be there when this lawyer called up, so my father took the phone. I don't know the conversation, but it ended up that my father listened to this fellow berating, and he carried on a conversation like the whole thing had been dropped, that there wasn't any necessity, et cetera. He carried a conversation on to be heard by this man that all was well and fine, and that a settlement of a couple hundred dollars would be fine. And my father paid him the money, and left. He continued

to see him, take care of him. The man was perfectly happy, but he shoved this lawyer out of the way. That was one that I remember.

The Turkey Shoot

Bonnie: Apparently, in this little town, which always delighted me, in the winter everybody gathered in the leather shop, where they were always fixing harnesses, et cetera, and that was the meeting place for the whole village, of men particularly, swapping--there was a big stove and so on--swapping stories.

My father needed to find something more to do in the winter, though. So he got the idea of having a crap shoot--trap shoot, that is! [laughter] Crap shoot got on the sidelines, anyway. So he set up a place for traps right near his house, I guess, next to his house--there must have been a field--and he began collecting turkeys. They were to be the prizes. Mother had to take care of the turkeys, which were accumulating in the back yard, which had a fairly high fence over it.

Dad put an ad in the Portland paper that on this weekend there would be this trap shoot--and it was before Thanksgiving--and there would be turkeys as prizes, et cetera. Well, when the Inter-Urban {the name of the train} came out on the day of the trap shoot, it was hung, literally, with men with their guns coming out to the trap shoot. Dad was nonplussed, so he set up crap games with 10 percent going to the house, and he was running around like mad. He was finally forced to buy back turkeys from people that won them so he could have--he ran out of turkeys.

But the story I loved best connected with this trap shoot was the fact that my mother was going mad in the weeks before, because the turkeys would get out, they'd fly over the fence, and then she was running around the town trying to catch the turkeys. She said she'd make dives for them, grab their tail feathers, and the turkeys would sort of go "eemph," and she'd have a handful of tail feathers. She was unsuccessful, and the turkeys were looking more motley all the time.

So somebody said to her, "What you've got to do is clip the wing." My mother thought that was brilliant, and she clipped both wings. And it didn't make any difference. They just were a little slower, but they still could get around the fence. Obviously, it wasn't high enough. Anyway, she kept them in the pen, and the trap shoot was a great success. I don't know how many times my father did it.

Bill: What did your mother do when she was there, besides the turkey business?

Bonnie: Well, she had me shortly, I guess, afterwards.

Bill: Is that where you were born, in Hillsboro?

Bonnie: That's where I was born. I was born in a Portland hospital, in 1914, April. So she had a summer with me, and then they moved to Seattle. I'm not quite sure of the year that they moved to Seattle, and I think my father must have moved because he was given another agency in Seattle. I think he felt that Hillsboro was going to be a very slow, long thing to develop, too.

The Car Business Through Prohibition and Depression

Bill: How long roughly were they in Hillsboro?

Bonnie: I would think they were there about two years, two and a half years, something like that. And I'm not sure exactly where my brother was born. He was two years later than me, so Mother may have been pregnant again when she got to Seattle. I have a feeling he was born in Seattle. I remember vaguely, we lived on Boylston North or something, looking down on Lake Union in Seattle on a steep hill. And then, as we grew a little older, we moved to the Madrona District, and had a very nice but small bungalow in the Madrona District. Dad's business was beginning to really develop. At that time, he was on Pike Street--or Pine Street, which was sort of the automotive center.

My father was a--[laughs] he hung in, you know. I remember going to visit him once. This must have been after the crash, but before I went to New York. I went to visit my father at his place on Pike Street--I think it was Pike Street--and there were just automobile sales areas, all used cars, all along the way. To save money they had a kind of back room upstairs in my father's office, and he'd set it up so they could make their lunches there, because they couldn't afford to go out.

He had a very funny friend who was round as could be, a real character, and he would make what later were called Dagwood sandwiches. I've never seen sandwiches that built up like this at all. They'd have--well, it was Prohibition, so they had illegal whiskey I suppose, or something. So that was that period, then, with my father.

Then his business began to improve, and he moved out to the University District. This must have been early twenties, mid-

twenties, I must have been about seven or eight, because I know that I went to Caird Leslie's classes not too far from Dad's office. By the time I was going to New York, Dad had developed an insurance company, and he had a wonderful garage for fixing cars, and he sold new cars and trucks on Roosevelt Way, which was also an automotive area--it had moved from the center of town, because they didn't have enough space.

He was one of the leading car people in town. He lost it all during the Depression, which came along a bit later, as I said, in Seattle. I can remember being literally terrified because my dad worked so late. He'd keep his shop open, and he'd do his books late at night, and he was really carrying this load by himself, he let men go. I remember that he did not come home one evening by about eleven-thirty, and my mother was panic-stricken because he had seventeen miles to drive to get to our house along a highway with sometimes pretty crazy drivers on this two-lane highway.

Bill: Also, hadn't the previous owner of the house been killed coming from Seattle to Bothell?

Bonnie: Yes. And so my mother was really, really quite terrified. She had called his office and gotten no answer. Well, he came home probably about one, and she was really frantic. I think she had let the local police know, put out a watch and so on.

He had fainted in his office, from a terrible flu, he was probably very run-down. He was very sick. Apparently he'd vomited and was really miserable but he managed to get himself home. I can remember, I was never one who prayed, but I was beside my bed praying like mad, because I could hear this conversation with my mother, because the phone was halfway up the stairs, and it was a grinder phone, I could hear in her voice how panic-stricken she was. She was really concerned.

Bill: Did you say she'd been worried about him before?

Bonnie: No. She would worry if he was very late. My father wasn't a drinker. He could drink, but he was sensible about it. He wouldn't drive if he was drunk or anything like--but he didn't get drunk. I never saw my father drunk.

Mother Behind the Wheel

Bonnie: In this most affluent period, about 1927, 1928, he bought the house in the country, and he adored it, and my mother did too, but my mother didn't know how to drive. And the story of her driving was very funny. When she was young and they were living in

Hillsboro, my father thought she should learn to drive. Women were driving. These were all open coupes, two-seaters. You had a dust coat and a hat. So he got a sailor who knew how to drive cars, very nice fellow.

Heidi: He didn't try to teach her?

Bonnie: He didn't try to teach her, no--

Bill: Too smart.

Bonnie: He was smart. [laughter] He knew she had quite a temper, so he wasn't going to put his head in the jaw of the lion.

He got this fellow to take Mother driving. He was doing a very good job, and Mother was learning and so on. But a gust of wind blew her skirt up, and she took both hands off and slammed down. The sailor read her a riot act. He didn't care about it blowing up, and he said, "You are not to take both hands off the wheel," et cetera. And she was so insulted, she would never take another lesson. [laughter] And she never did. So Dad had to do all the driving.

Typical of a man who sold automobiles, we went driving every Sunday. We had long rides around town. Well, it was partly because Mother was house-bound except for streetcars and things. So when we came to the farm--and we had a two-car garage, which was a great luxury in those days--Mother knew she would go mad if she didn't learn how to drive.

So she rather indirectly asked my father if he would leave a car in the garage. She was going to learn all by herself. She was absolutely sure, having driven for so many years sitting beside him, that she knew how to work everything. And she may have been sneaking some advice from my brother, who was probably only ten or less, but was already very interested in mechanics of all kinds.

So Dad brought her a decent car, put it in the garage, told her some things about it, and left it there. A few days later, we came home, there was no car in the garage. It was understood she would drive around the farm. We had about seventeen acres and a lot of pasture and orchards and stuff like that. Not any roads. Daddy didn't say anything, and he and I were all eyes and ears to hear what had happened. After a while, Mother said, "Would you mind taking the car out of the orchard for me?" She had jammed it between two trees. [laughter] So Dad managed to get it out of the orchard.

The next time, she'd gone over a post. The car was suspended on the post. Well, this went on for ages while she learned to drive. Finally, when she did learn to drive--and I think she may have taken a bit of advice from him by this time, or from some friend--she was kind of chicken-hearted as a driver. She was terribly cautious going out on the roads.

I think by this time she was very involved in city politics and stuff. The man who gave the licenses and gave you your exam I think was totally intimidated by my mother. He would have given her a license no matter what, just to get her out of his hair. [laughter] So she got a license, and she felt rather confident then. She was a menace on the road, she drove so slowly and so carefully, but she was getting more involved, more needing her car with the PTA.

She would never drive in the city. She would drive in to the edge of the city and then take a bus. One afternoon she got behind a school bus or some kind of a bus that was dawdling along because they were ahead of their schedule or something, and Mother used her horn. The guy was probably so startled--he was probably daydreaming--he went practically off the road to get out of her way. She was so thrilled that she didn't take her hand off the horn for years! She just became a totally different driver. People just parted to let her by. Not that she drove fast, but she just scared them all.

She began to drive all over the state. But she had a very poor sense of direction. She would get the information about where she was to go for a PTA meeting or something in some little town, and before she'd go, Daddy would take her through the roads she was to take and so on. Then he'd get a call saying, "I don't know where I am." He'd say, "Well, could you tell me where you think you are?" [laughter] Well, she'd have shot through the town, and she was off in another town. So either he had to go out and get her there, or else he took her through another map and got her to wherever she was to be.

Well, for ages this happened over and over and over again, and Mother got feistier during this time, and she and I were having more conflicts, because we were both a little hot-tempered. I was a lot hot-tempered! I wasn't beating people up, but I had one magnificent fight with my brother.

[end tape 3, side B]

[begin tape 4, side A]

Bonnie and Her Brothers

Bonnie: My mother was very disturbed that when he was about twelve my brother Bill was still very small. She decided that the milk wasn't giving him enough, and we had pasteurized milk. So she went all around and found a man who had tuberculin-free cows so she could get raw milk that was safe and so on. She was very opposed to most raw things. So she began feeding him this tuberculin-free raw milk.

And I suppose it was partially just time, but he began to shoot up, and he grew very tall, he went to about six feet. His bones--his tendons weren't growing as fast as his bones were growing, so he was always sort of lying around--[laughter] kind of exhausted with this whole growing process. And he was beginning to tease my mother. He was not the world's best student, and my mother loved him dearly, but she was sort of dominating him a bit. So they would have some pretty hot exchanges.

One night I came home with my father, and my brother wasn't around. My mother looked extremely still, as though she was at the end of something, a frayed end. She was getting supper, and she said, "I wish you would go look for your brother." So I started looking, presumably in the house, and I looked all over. I went in our bedrooms, I went in--and we had dozens of small attic spaces. The way the house was built, there were all kinds of attic spaces.

Finally, I heard a funny snuffling, and I looked under his bed. He was half-crying and half-laughing. I dragged him out and I said, "What's the matter?" He began to tell me that he had been teasing Mother, and probably using some new language my mother didn't approve of, and her temper was rising. She was getting supper. She told him in no uncertain terms to get out of the kitchen.

Off the kitchen we had a long hall that went into the dining room. You could go another way into the dining room, with an Oriental rug on it, and French doors at the end of this hall. Apparently, he kept teasing her as he ran down the hall, and she had a small frying pan in her hands, and she let go of the frying pan and hit him on his little bottom.

He was insulted beyond belief. So he had disappeared crying and furious and so on. She was terribly upset that she had done such a thing, but she must have been pushed by him too, because he could do that. So he and I sat just collapsed with laughter over this picture of my mother throwing this frying pan and hitting him so accurately on the bottom. That just killed me. So I eventually got him downstairs to supper, and all quiet reigned.

Not too long after this, when I was still able to fight with my brother and win, because he hadn't grown so big, and I had powerful knees from riding on horses, sticking on them bareback, et cetera--I was very proud of the fact that I could clamp him to the floor--I was supposed to be in charge of the house when they were out one evening. Something--I have no idea what started the fight, but this fight began to go through the house with my brother running and me chasing him and getting him down. Poor Scotty, who was five or something, would hang around not knowing what to do, crying--poor upset little boy, really disturbed by the whole thing.

My brother, I got him down, and I held him furiously and was pummelling him, and he bit me on the back of the hand. He had broken his teeth falling out of the house--I told you that story--when we lived in the Madrona District, and they said, "We can't fix them until they grow a bit more," because there were teeth coming in. So he had these sort of chopped-off teeth, and when he bit me it was a real fang, and I said, "I have hydrophobia!" because I got a real swell from that. He must have hit a blood vessel. And I was more furious with him, and I really pummelled him. But I think I got too exhausted, and so we gave up. And I had to calm Scotty down, since I was in charge of him.

Another night, when I was sleeping in my parents' bed because Scotty was still small enough to be in their room, my brother came in looking absolutely pale and worried. He had taken the car out of the garage, and he had somehow or other had an accident on the highway, and the police had to come. He was in a great distress, and I was furious with him. I wasn't going to let him get away with it, and I wasn't going to fill in for him. So I made him go back and talk to the police and do whatever he had to do, and then when Dad came home, he took over. I don't remember that anything very big happened. The car probably was only in a ditch. I'll have to ask Bill sometime about that.

Horse Stories

Bonnie: Our life was extremely colorful on this ranch between my father's wild west shows and Mother's crazy parties, which were great fun.

Bill: We haven't heard about the wild west shows. We'll have to get back to that.

Bonnie: Right. That's a whole other deal.

Bill: Why don't we stop here--[tape interruption]

Bonnie: --and I was riding English saddle. I was being snooty at this time, and proving that I could. This horse had somehow or other gotten loco weed. It was a beautiful horse. I started riding it out of the grounds, and I was going to ride off to a lovely German lady who lived in the woods and who had to escape to the woods. She was a professor at the University of Washington during the First World War, and the antagonism toward Germans was so great that she took refuge in a cabin in the woods.

My mother discovered her. She was a lovely, lovely person. I began to take German lessons with her, partly because then Mother could give her legally some money, and she was very proud. She lived with her brother there. I had discovered her by riding in the woods and coming into a berry patch that looked wild to me. I didn't see the house. So I got off my horse and I was eating berries. I thought it was an abandoned patch.

This charming lady said, "Would you like me to give you a basket?" I almost fell over with shock and surprise and embarrassment. We got to talking, and became very good friends. She wasn't very far from us in this woods. Mother became a very good friend of hers, and actually cared for her. She became blind and difficult, and cared for her until she died.

Bill: Were they squatters, or did they own the place?

Bonnie: No, her brother owned this little cabin. But she was really so charming and so lovely.

I was riding off in this direction--I don't think I was going to her place that day--and suddenly this horse, on an English saddle it was very hard to keep from sliding off the saddle--was just walking on its hind legs, pawing the air and coming clomping down and then going up again, in agony I guess. I finally got him back into the yard, and had hung on with one hand. I said to my brother, "I can't manage him. There's something wrong." My brother got on him, and Bill could cling like a burr, if he didn't have a saddle at all. That horse, he took him out, and again the horse started up and down. But he went the other way, down a hill.

He thought he'd calm him down, and all of a sudden the horse came back without my brother. Well, I was terrified. I ran in the house and I told my mother, and I did laugh at my mother--we had little balconies outside of our living room. They were about seven or eight feet above the ground, the top of the balcony. Mother went through the open door and leaped over the balcony--[laughing] she didn't wait for stairs--and tore down the hill and found my brother grumpily walking up the hill because he'd fallen

off the back of the horse. He just couldn't stick. The horse was just absolutely straight up.

Well, we tied the horse up, put him in his stall, and my father came home, and they had to work on that horse for weeks, because it was sick. I don't think they destroyed it, but it had a poisoning. It was really quite something.

My father bought a horse called Chester, a polo pony. My father had no business buying these horses that were trained for things that we'd never do. But it was a gorgeous-looking horse. He probably traded it for a car, who knows. He brought this horse home, and this was for Mother. Well, Mother was a good rider, but she wasn't going to ride this polo pony, because he had a really awful habit. He could turn on a dime, which all polo ponies have to--they sort of go one, and then scrunch, and then turn. So he was fun to ride, once you were on him, but getting on him was a problem, because his head would swing around and he'd bite your bottom, and you'd go off the other side. He just turned like this, so it was like trying to get on to a merry-go-round from the inside. We had more fun with this horse, but we also fell off more often.

I remember my father deciding this horse was going to be tamed. He had his cat-o'-nine-tails, and he had a special kind of rein he put on the horse, so you'd hold his head sharp the other way, put your foot in the stirrup, and try to swing yourself over. Somehow or other, he would jerk his head, pull the rein out, and he'd bite my father's bottom. My father must have had the bluest bottom anybody ever had, because he stuck it out until the horse was worn out. All morning, these two circled and bit.

Heidi: Fought it out.

Bonnie: Fought it out.

When I first arrived I was given my horse, Bright Eyes, which had been a circus horse and used in the circus for bareback riding, so it was a stocky horse--you had to have broad backs--and it had a grey mane and tail, and it was a bay color, and had china blue eyes, which was unusual. It had such a beautiful roach to the neck--it was kind of a thick neck and its mane would not turn over, like people whose hair just grows up straight and then finally kind of tips at the top? it was weird-looking, so you had to roach it, you had to cut it, because it looked awful. And it had a long, coarse grey tail. It was quite a handsome horse, stocky and handsome, but with a mind of its own. It was an intelligent horse, and patient in its own way, but when it got tired of being patient it really knew what to do.

I didn't know the horse very well, but I'd ridden quite a lot. My brother's friends were in the field, the sort of corral--actually, it was a big meadow. And there was a bedspring that nobody had pulled out of this field. I thought, "Well, they can't ride, I'll give them a ride on the bedspring. I'll tie a rope to the pommel, sit on the rope, it will go over the horse's back, and I'll tie it to the bedspring." Because it looked to me like a sled. It was a double bed, and it was metal of course.

Well, as soon as I gave the spur to the horse he went right ahead, and the rope tightened and hit him on the bottom in such a sharp way that he bucked. He bucked me right over the pommel onto his neck. He stood stock-still. The kids had sort of fallen backwards, because the bed wasn't going to slide, it was just going to sink in the dirt. And I was on this horse, and the ground looked awfully far away, and I was wobbling on his neck because it was a heavy neck. And he was getting tired of me sitting there, so his head was going lower and lower. I didn't get off, I was just hanging on.

He got tired of this, so he started walking--they'd untied the rope--started walking toward the barn, and suddenly decided he was sick of me, having to walk with his head down, and he gave a buck and tossed me off on my back. There was a board across a little sort of declivity in the ground, and I hit it right across my back and it knocked all my wind out.

I wasn't really hurt, but I couldn't catch my breath, I couldn't say a thing. I was just standing with my mouth open, and the kids were rolling around laughing like mad, of course, at this. I was so insulted, I wanted to yell at them! That was my introduction to my horse. And I didn't want to ride that horse, because I was sure he'd buck me off.

My father, the next Sunday, he said, "After church, get in your riding clothes and I'll meet you out in the field." I came downstairs very intimidated in my riding clothes, and he gave me a cat-o'-nine-tails. He had my horse out in the field all saddled up, and he said, "You get on that horse." He stood in the middle of the field, and I had to ride the horse at different paces until I was in charge of the horse. If he bucked or anything, I had to hold--had to stay. He yelled directions at me, and I got over it, actually. I got in charge of the horse, I got past being scared. Because the horse was only doing what came naturally.

Bill: Was the cat-o'-nine-tails used to discipline the horse?

Bonnie: Yes, a cat-o'-nine-tails is just like a crop, but it has nine fringes, so the horse gets nine little shocks. I hardly used crops. I carried them, but I'd use my heels.

Interview 4: August 1, 1994
[continuing tape 4, side A]

School Memories: Madrona School in Seattle

Bill: We're in business. August 1, by golly, 1994. Why don't we start with school. Let's go back to your earliest school experience. Where was that?

Bonnie: My earliest school experience was at the Madrona School in Seattle. I think I went from first grade through eighth grade there. It was up a long hill from our house, which was at Howell Street. You had either a streetcar ride or you walked, which of course I did, I walked up. Occasionally my father would drive me up if he was going that way in the car.

But I can remember the marvels of a Model T. One time, for some reason, he had taken me on a not direct route, and he ran out of gas. The hills were so steep, and he turned the car around and he drove up backwards. That was possible because the gas tanks were gravity-flow, so he got the very last out of the gas tank by going backwards up the road, which impressed me no end.

Another time, I remember that I must have been late for school, or else dawdled. I suddenly found I was the only child--this was probably first or second grade--the only child walking to school. I became terrified, because there was sort of a dark, thundery cloud overhead. I made it actually to school, but I was absolutely terrified. I remember that terror of being the only child, and I must have been late.

I had a first-grade teacher or second-grade teacher, I don't remember which, named Miss Pankhurst. She was shaped like a pyramid, and she had many double chins. But I don't think I ever thought about her double chins until one day I was supposed to deliver a note to her in the teachers' room. I knocked, and she said, "Open the door." She was powdering her chins and dropping them, one by one as she finished. [laughter] It was incredible to me. I stood just glued, looking at her.

I also remember a woman named Miss Graham who was the principal of the school. For some reason, I was sent to talk to Miss Graham. Possibly I'd been naughty in class or something, I don't know. I sat waiting in an outer office, and I was terrified

to meet her, because I had been told that she had been ill for a while, and she'd had eye surgery. One of the kids had said, "You know how they do it these days? They take the eye out and they lay it on the cheek, and they clean it up, and they stick it back." I was terrified she'd drop an eye out, and I was almost unable to talk. So she asked me, she wheedled out of me why I was so scared, and she just hooted with laughter at this idea. Ultimately, she put me very much at ease.

Bill: Bonnie, as the daughter of a schoolteacher, did you go to school well prepared? Had you already learned to read by the time you started school?

Bonnie: I think I was very average. I don't remember. Mother certainly read us stories, and I can't remember if I was ahead in anything. I know that I got called on the carpet because of a test--this must have been second or third or fourth grade--and I'd written something on my hand to be sure that I was able to pass the test, and I was exposed. That was pretty awful. It was spelling, I think.

I had quite a few friends who lived not too far away from me, and there were nice things. One of the kids had a sort of attic room, so we wrote plays and produced plays and charged pins for them, two pins, three pins, or something like that. Our parents would come to see our plays and be probably very nice and probably very confused too. I think I got a sense of theater. I hadn't seen much theater, but I got some sense of this performing business.

And then I fell in love with my fifth grade teacher. I should remember her name--the names I should know best I've just dropped out lately. I wrote her little notes. I was absolutely enamored of the five and dime store, because I could save enough money to buy a little glass horse or something like this--at Christmas we gave our teachers little Christmas presents. I think my notes must have been full of declarations of love, but put in a very childish and funny way.

It all came to a crashing end because I came upstairs--. We had a huge central stairway, and then the rooms were off that--it was an old wooden school, nice big rooms. And I remember cedar stuff they cleaned the floors with, so they were sort of oiled wood floors. We had a little cloak room outside of each classroom where we hung up our clothes. That's where we also got sent when we were naughty.

I was coming into the room, and in the cloak room two teachers were standing and laughing like mad. I recognized that

my favorite teacher was reading one of my letters to the other one, and I was crushed beyond belief.

Bill: Why did you love her so much? What was it about her?

Bonnie: I just think that was the age that you fall for somebody. She had no outstanding characteristics that I can remember at all, except she was slightly younger than some of them. There were some quite elderly ladies around.

I think I enjoyed many subjects, but a lot of my life was not in school. I remember that I was cast in my first play when I was probably in third grade, because we always did little plays. And another thing, we always had visits from the firemen and from the policemen and so on, who told us about their duties. But I was cast in this play, which must have been about health, as a milk bottle. [laughter] A full bottle of milk. My costume--I had a {what?} around me, I remember that.

Real and Imaginary Babies

Bonnie: I also remember that when my brother Scott was born I had no idea my mother was pregnant. I think in those days ladies just didn't talk about their pregnancy, they just arranged to wear dresses that sort of masked them. If Mother talked about it, it just in through one ear and out the other. But I must have picked up something, because late one night, and this would have been in March, my father was on the phone, which was unusual in the middle of the night, and I woke up to hear him say that he had just admitted Mrs. Bird to the hospital.

Probably she started to have labor pains, and so he dashed her into the hospital and hadn't signed her in, or nobody was at the registration or something. So he telephoned to say she was there, please pay attention, and so on. I remember saying to my father that I hoped that Mother would bring us a little child from the hospital. I thought they came from hospitals.

So it turned out my wish was granted. I very much enjoyed the whole business of Scott arriving, because I was ten and he was--a baby was kind of magical. I was also very interested in pushing the carriage, and thrilled when I got the first smile out of him and that sort of thing. My father was actually better at caring for him than my mother, and I felt someplace in me that I was superior to my mother.

Bill: He was your baby.

Bonnie: Yes, it was my baby. I had dolls, but I was so confused--I didn't like many girls' names, and I wasn't particularly fond of mine, so I ended up numbering my dolls. [laughter] Because I really was not going to shove names on them. Mother, I remember, hand-sewed the clothing for a darling little doll, beautiful little thing, in a little bassinet. And I carried this around with great pride, even though I didn't play with dolls much. I carried it around with great pride, and some kid in the neighborhood came out and gave it a kick on the bottom from my hand, and the doll went out and broke.

That sort of put paid to my doll involvement. I did continue to have dolls, but I never really--I didn't do a lot of house playing. I did for a while with my brother. And poor Bill, I used to dress him up in my father's clothes. And then I saw--my father brought home a Victrola, and these were brand new, and he brought some records. The records had labels that showed the artists that were singing in scenes from the opera. So I quickly associated the singers, but their costumes were very important. And one thing that was extremely important was a bead hanging here--{please finish this thought}

[end tape 4, side A]

[begin tape 4, side B]

Bonnie: [Transition of conversation lost between tape changes.] I was singing away, probably off-key and everything else, because I was actually terrified to sing at school. I'm sure I was a monotone, and I was just too self-conscious about using my voice. I think my refuge was dance, because it didn't require any voice work.

Bill: Were your parents opera buffs?

Bonnie: They weren't opera buffs. I think it was something they couldn't afford. But Mother was very interested in theater, and so was my father, so they did go occasionally to the theater, but I don't think they were great culture hounds at all.

Aunt Grace and the Adolph Bolm Class

Bonnie: One funny thing that happened, maybe I told you this. My Aunt Grace had a very good friend who was a dance teacher in Bakersfield, and my Aunt Laura and my two cousins and Aunt Grace, who was the driver, I think, and her friend, came to Seattle to stay the duration of probably a two- or three-week special class at the Cornish School, where teachers could study with Adolph Bolm. This bouncy woman stayed at our house--Mother and Dad had a tent put up in the back yard. Aunt Fanny came too, so Virginia--

maybe not Virginia but Scott was there for some--and the children all slept in the tent in the back yard, with Aunt Fanny as our overseer.

We were all terribly excited to be so many children together. And of course, there were trips to the Madrona beach, which wasn't far away, and things like this. We had tendencies to have dreams and wake up a little confused as to where we are, but one of my cousins must have gotten in a mental fight, because he began fighting the canvas of the tent. Earwigs fell out by the thousands. My aunt woke up with earwigs landing on the bed--they don't fly. So she got us all up, and we had to clean up the whole thing and so on.

One evening, Mother and Dad cleared the rug back for this friend to give a demonstration of her classes. My cousins and I were all kneeling near a couch, watching this affair. She was a little pudgy. We thought her spinning and turning was funny beyond belief, and I don't think I've ever laughed so hard, and I was trying not to laugh, and of course, anything by this time sets you off. It's just maniacal. We kept burying ourselves in the couch and laughing wildly.

Well, the same person a little later took me to see the student performance that came out of this, and I was enthralled, because it was one of the few times by then I'd seen the theater. I think I was seven or six or something. The curtain opened on the Cornish stage, and there was a beautiful fountain of pale blue, looked like water, pouring down to the ground. It began to vibrate, and then girls came up--they were tipped way over, of course, and their tulle skirts hung down. This vibrating thing became dancers. I remember that so distinctly. I was enchanted by that whole concert. So my laughter at what I'd seen had to do with what I didn't know, really, and the pooh-poohing by my cousins at dance altogether.

Bill: Was that before you saw--

Bonnie: Before I saw Pavlova.

Bill: And before you'd seen Caird?

Bonnie: Right. During that time was when we went on summer trips, and went Sunday driving around. I began to learn about Seattle by these drives that my father would take us on, although my brother and I were awfully impatient. We were the only two at that time. We were terribly impatient to be sitting in back of the car two or three hours.

Holiday Trips in the Marmon, and Bainbridge Island Summers

Bonnie: Dad's idea of a real holiday was to pack up something as big as a Marmon, which he had originally, a nine-passenger car, and he built boxes to store things in, and we would set off into the mountains. Well, he was a hunter, so he knew a lot of places to go, and usually with a couple of other families. We'd bump over these narrow mountain roads and finally come to sort of a meadowy place or some good place for camping, and then we'd camp for a week or so. I learned a lot about packing food and hanging it from trees, because there were bears. That was very exciting.

I do remember that we--it must have been this same Marmon car, and we were going camping, but not with another family. Mother said, "I think the children need to go to the bathroom," and Dad said, "Oh, I'll stop." But he always was looking for the perfect place, and he went on and on. My brother and I were fretting in the back seat, and he went over a bump and our heads went up and hit the crossbar that held the folding top back. We came down and it was all over. Mother was so mad at my father, because she knew it wasn't our fault. So those were some of the sort of ridiculous things.

That was the time we lived on Bainbridge Island in the summers. It was before we moved out in the country. Also, Dad would take my brothers and I on short camping trips. He liked to pack up a boat, like a big rowboat with a motor, and putt around. I remember one time--we must have gone up to the Orcas, San Juan Islands, and we camped on the beaches and looked for clams and oysters and things like this. These were the things that were cooked, and we camped out that way, going from island to island, which was lovely. We really enjoyed that.

And of course, with had an Indian living with us later there was an increasing interest in Indian lore. My father, because he ran the wild west shows, which were rodeos, he wanted color for the rodeo so that it looked like a real western town. Some of these little towns, like Issaquah, were very western. They had one little hotel and one little post office, and so on. You wouldn't believe it now, it's just a suburb of Seattle.

So he hired a whole Indian tribe, at a dollar a day or something like that for each member of the family, but they had to bring their Indian tents and they had to sleep in tepees, et cetera, and pursue Indian-like things. So there were many Indians that were very fond of him for this.

The Snohomish Indians, I believe it was, held a powwow, and made my father a member of the tribe, an honorary chief. I

thought their choice of name was very funny: they called him Chief Stay on the Horse, as though they were {what?}. And they potlatched and they played all kinds of games. The Indians give away their wives, if they're down to no property left at all when they gamble, playing stick games and various kinds of things like this.

Mother was of two minds about his becoming an Indian chief. [laughs] But for him, it was a kind of lark, and for years we had an Indian cedar band made of torn cedar, ripped off the bark, that was his headdress that they had put on him in a ceremony. So the life out of school was quite colorful.

I had a lot of responsibility in the sense that once we lived in the country, we had to do a lot of work. There was always stuff to be done. But it was also fun, and we had friends who had horses, so we would ride with them. I had a good friend named Mary Brookheimer, and she lived about three miles away. Her father was a lawyer in town. There were a number of Brookheimer boys, and Mary, and probably another sister, I don't remember.

We would go riding in the summertime at about five-thirty or six, because the sun was coming up and it was very beautiful. But we were never sure that each of us would wake up properly. So we arranged, because we each had upstairs bedrooms, to tie a yarn to our big toe, hang it out the window with a stone, so if somebody came to either house--we either met halfway or you went on to the other person's house--if you went there, you pulled the string and wake them up. [laughter] There were all kinds of crazy kinds of things that we did like this.

Father's Amusing Friends

Bonnie: Dad had a lot of amusing friends that ran restaurants or were newspaper men. One wonderful man was named Another Smith, who was a famous sports photographer for the Seattle Times. He loved coming out to the ranch, to Robin Hill--I never know whether to call it a farm or a ranch--because there was always something going on that he found funny to photograph. And that lovely photograph of my brother [Scott] with his hair flying, riding his beautiful little Welsh pony, galloping with a hand in the hair, all alive, was taken by Another Smith. He got his name when he worked at the Times and the operator was always calling and saying, "A call for Mr. Smith," and he'd answer the phone, and it was always another Smith. So he officially changed his name to Another Smith. [laughs]

My father hunted every year for deer up on Vancouver Island. He had a friend there whom I would have loved to have met named Cougar Smith. Cougar Smith was famous as a hunter and as a guide for hunting on Vancouver Island. At that time there was a bounty on cougars, because they had lots of sheep running, and cougars were supposedly the enemy of the sheep, which wasn't really true. So you got forty dollars if you brought in a cougar. And that was quite a lot of money then. That was the pressure politically.

But Cougar Smith guided hunting groups, and he himself would set out with his dog and some flour and some tea and stuff like this, and he'd live for days out in the wilds. My father went with him on a number of occasions, and they swapped stories. Cougar Smith had wonderful stories, and my father wasn't bad at it either.

But he always came home with whatever the number of deer you could have, and I have a photograph of my father and his very plump friend, who was an automobile man who liked to hunt, and the car is absolutely draped with deer. And then they went duck shooting in the valley near us. Ben Boone loved pheasant hunting. The only problem in his family is that when he caught pheasant--and you could get ten or something like that--he brought back so many pheasant, and then they were put into a locker, not a freezer, and he wanted them eaten during {?} right {?}. So the kids in the Boone family had pheasant for breakfast, pheasant for lunch, pheasant for dinner, and they objected.

The Boone family was really great fun. One of them was named for me, Barbara Montana Boone {right?}. There were a couple of them named for states--Beverly Ann Texas--because these were the favorite states of her father, and he always called them "Tex" and "Montana." My father and Ben, and several of the other cronies he had for many years, played poker once a week at one or another's house. Ben set up a target for them to practice shooting with. It was a tin figure that ran from the house on a pulley and went zooming out into the woods, and they had so much time--you said, "Let it go," and you pulled out your pistol and shot at it.

Boyfriends, Girlfriends

Bonnie: There was always something going, I must say. As soon as I got home from school; there were all kinds of things. I was wooed for a while--I was about fourteen or fifteen--by a friend of my brother's, who was a boy named Vincent. His family just lived over the hill from us. He would have my horse ready every evening when I came home from school so I could go riding. He was a kind of tall, silent type.

But he was getting more serious than I knew. He was building a funny little sort of hut in the back of his family's property, and I would go down and help him nail boards on and stuff like that, and so would my brother. And then one day, he said he'd like to marry me, and he produced a gun. As though this was to confirm it. I was a little startled and thought it was time for me to leave, because it wasn't entering my head at all. So we were estranged. I really didn't see him much again after that.

But he got into some trouble, and lo and behold, my father, who thought he was a very nice fellow, and thought maybe this interest in having me marry him was probably a problem, my father went into court and he didn't bail him out, but he had to do work. They had work farms in those days, prisons that were not prisons in a sense, but you had to work on the farm for so many days. Dad went up and got him out, and kept track of him for quite a few years, helping him to get back on his feet. But it was a small town, and you did those kinds of things.

Bill: Did you have a boyfriend in high school?

Bonnie: I didn't really. I was so--I had no social life in a funny way, except connected with my home, because going to school--I knew none of the kids in the high school in Bothell except those that were friends of my brothers' or my mother's friends. As you know, I went every morning to school, at Roosevelt High School, and then I left there, because I didn't have to do gym, at two o'clock to go to my classes at Cornish. Then I came home and I studied and I cleaned the barns or whatever was necessary. And then weekends I would ride. Some days I got home earlier than others. I would ride a lot, and I did meet people. But it was never the kind of social life many girls my age were having at all, because it wasn't an urban kind of life.

Bill: Did you have a best friend in those years?

Bonnie: I had several best friends, and largely that came through being a Campfire girl and going to Campfire camp for two weeks at a time. One of them's family enchanted me, because they lived over east in the mountains, and they ran an ice cream factory. She worked in it, and I thought that was the greatest thing. Bobbie Sawyer or something, we were really quite good friends.

I did have a friend earlier, a thin little girl, and we were really very, very good friends. We were probably six or so, and the big deal in our lives was going to each other's houses and making mud pies. [laughter] We'd go and we had a special place where we used different forms and laid out the mud pies. [laughing] But we remained friends for quite a long time.

And then I had a--gosh, while I was still in the Madrona District I had a very close friend. I'm trying to think what her name is. It's really awful to lose these names, because I just haven't thought about them for so many years. Her father was a very well known lawyer in town, and he was a social climber. They had a very, very handsome house, and my mother and her mother were good friends, or became good friends. We were really good buddies. We went riding together, English riding. We took our riding lessons together.

But we had decided we were going to be doctors, and it was a terrible fate for our dolls. [laughter] We preferred surgery to everything else. We did it meticulously, what we know about surgery. We sawed up our dolls and sewed them up and sawed them up, and so. Eventually, her father moved the family to the Highlands, which is the poshest place, and you have to be sort of invited to purchase a house in the Highlands. He was going up and up. I think he was the lawyer for the Seattle Times.

Class and Manners

Bonnie: Her mother, when he went out of town, would invite me to come and visit her, and we would have little exchanges like this, because our lives were going in very different directions. But we did keep in touch for a long, long time, and I loved going to her house. It was another huge house, and great fun. Her mother was lovely. But her father was down on all proletariat.

Bill: And that's what he considered you?

Bonnie: Oh, I was proletariat to the teeth. I still didn't know where to put my napkin ring, and which spoon to pick up and all that sort of stuff, and he was very formal.

Bill: Is that because your parents cared less about those things?

Bonnie: Mother was very special about our eating and so on, and proper forks and so on, but not elaborate. There weren't ten forks and butter knives and all this sort of stuff, it was how we ate and so on. I remembered much later being absolutely floored when I was in New York and invited to Dorothy Elmhirst's marvelous apartment. This was about a year after I'd been in New York. Miss Cornish was a close friend of Dorothy Elmhirst, and she wanted Dorothy to know me, since I was a kind of favorite student of Miss Cornish's for a long period of time. She always saw me when she came to New York, and kept track of my development.

I went to this place where there was a butler, and the butler was very English and austere. I wore ragged clothes, really. So he took my coat, and ushered me in to have a sherry before lunch in a lovely room, and then we had a luncheon. I was asked many questions and got very enthusiastic about what I was doing. He set down a plate with a finger bowl and some flowers floating in it. I hadn't a clue what that was for. I thought maybe you were supposed to drink it, but I was a little baffled by the flowers.

So I sort of ignored it, and sitting on the plate were the dessert fork and spoon, and I didn't move them. I didn't notice that everybody else took their finger bowl, set it aside, and then moved the final silverware themselves. He came with great ostentation, and he put his big arms around me and moved everything. I was absolutely cowered with misery at that moment. [laughter] I recovered somehow or other.

Bill: Your family was pretty fairly middle class?

Bonnie: We were middle class, yes. But my mother was a lot more informal. Mother really didn't like the very stuffy, aristocratic thing. And yet Mother would have loved to be in that group.

Bill: To have married that count, right?

Bonnie: Yes, married that count. Mother was given to saying things like-- which really related to the upper classes, where you can really get away with murder if you do it with style and all that sort of thing--she was pretty questioning of a lot of things.

Mother was interested in money, because it represented a certain power. We didn't have it. I think that it was--I think she got irritated with my father every once in a while, because she thought that he could do better financially than ever happened. And yet the real things she treasured were really of good value, important things like that.

Heidi: You didn't have a boyfriend, but you had a hope chest, didn't you?

Bonnie: Oh, this same boyfriend built me the hope chest.

Heidi: The same one who proposed at gunpoint?

Bonnie: That's right. I don't know what he was doing with a gun that day.

Heidi: He didn't actually sort of tell you you had to marry him?

Bonnie: No, or point it at me or anything. But I was leery of that gun-- it was a pistol. He was such a quiet sort of fellow that I was a little anxious about what that might mean.

Other kinds of things that were fun and funny were building a tree house. We had a beautiful grove of fir not far from the house, and I built a tree house all by myself. I would pile up a lot of quilts and stuff on top of my head, and walk out and climb up the tree. I'd made just slats up the tree. But we had a goose and a gander, and they had produced nine goslings. They marched around the place in formation, goose at the top and gander at the rear, herding these little ones. I didn't see they were anywhere near, and suddenly I was being attacked by this angry gander, and he could take a piece out of your leg. I couldn't even get to the tree. So the only thing I could do was to drop all the quilts around him so he'd attack the quilts, and hope he'd go away after a while.

Bill: I think we're just about at the end of this little tape.

Bonnie: And we're just about out of time.

[end tape 4, side B]

[Interview 5:
[begin tape 5, side A]

III MARTHA GRAHAM AND THE NEIGHBORHOOD PLAYHOUSE SCHOOL

Louise Solberg and the Elmhirst Connection to the Cornish School

Bill: Bonnie, you know we had the cliffhanger story when Miss Cornish said the ballet classes were going to be ended, and you organized the underground ballet corps. We never did move from there to what happened both to the ballet group and also the new wind that blew in from the East.

Bonnie: Well, what happened was that Miss Cornish hired Louise Solberg, who had grown up in the Northwest and whose family were friends of Aunt Nellie's. Louise, I think, had gone to the Cornish School in her teenage years, and then she had gone off to dance in Europe.

Because Miss Cornish was a friend of Dorothy Elmhirst, Louise went to Dartington Hall, which had been taken over--it was part of two thousand acres which included the town of Tolnes, I believe, in Devonshire. It was a 13th-century manor house, beautiful grounds, absolutely beautiful grounds, which still had a bear pit for the fighting of bear, and jousting, and so on. They maintained these gardens very beautifully. Dorothy Elmhirst had been the wife of somebody-Straight, who was the ambassador to China. She had two, maybe three children by him. One was Beatrice Straight, who became a good friend of mine and was a very fine actress. Beatrice was fifteen or sixteen at this time.

Louise became a member of the Jooss Ballet. This was in the early thirties, very early thirties, and Kurt Jooss would spend summers originally at Dartington, which was a kind of art center. I should say that Straight died, and Dorothy, who was an American, spent a lot of time in England where she met Leonard Elmhirst, who was one of a number of boys in a family, and they were married. He was a great follower of Tagore and Indian philosophers. She had the money--she came from the C.F. Whitney family, and there was a huge Whitney Foundation.

They decided to take this land, which was in very bad state because England was suffering badly from a depression, and following principles of Tagore--. People don't know that Tagore was an agronomist, they consider him a poet mostly, but he was a philosopher and an agronomist. Leonard had spent some years working on experimental farms in India, where he was trying to

develop crafts and give people a chance to find livelihoods for themselves, to be trained.

They decided to establish I guess a trust, and to utilize the manor house and all the sort of barns and things around it as an art center. Bernard Leach, the famous potter, was there. [Gustav] Holst's daughter {}, who was a very good composer, was there. These were all unknowns at that time. And Jooss was there with his company from time to time. He was doing a lot of touring outside of Germany.

So Louise joined his company. She had to leave in the particular year, which I think was 1928 or '29, she had to leave to join the company that was going to tour. So Miss Cornish had to find somebody to replace her for the last, from May to August, I guess, for summer school and the last part of the regular term. She called Martha Graham, whom she knew, who liked Aunt Nellie very much, and who had just finished playing the Chosen One in "A Rite of Spring," which was produced by [Leopold] Stokowski. Stokowski got [Léonide] Massine to do the whole work, more or less in I suppose the tradition of the Diaghilev Ballet.

But Martha, Stokowski insisted, was the one to dance the Chosen One. Massine didn't know what to do with her. She wasn't any kind of a dancer he knew about. So she really created her own solo, and it was so stunning that it accomplished a great deal for this ballet, which I think her company was in. It was a funny mix of modern and ballet dancers. The ballet dancers always sang, they never counted. This was a difficult work of Stravinsky's, and you had to count to come in on the right beat and so on. So it was quite a struggle for the ballet dancers.

Martha had about a five-minute solo, which is quite long, and it's a dance of death, really. It's a sacrificial dance. I believe that it made Time magazine, and this was unheard of for anybody but Diaghilev and Nijinsky and so on. So she was already gaining a good deal of national fame instead of just local, which she already had some of.

Martha said that she couldn't come, that she had to finish this assignment, but she recommended a young Swedish dancer named Ronnie Johansson. Ronnie Johansson came for three, four weeks--I don't remember exactly--to teach. She was a totally charming person, very gamine, very sort of funny and bright. She gave a concert, very European, which we had hardly seen at all. She had studied--I think she started with Swedish gymnastics, but of the variety that is rhythmic gymnastics. Then she'd studied, probably in Europe someplace. I just don't know her history, but we thought she was quite wonderful.

By this time, I should say, working with Louise Solberg, we gave up the ballet underground very shortly, as Miss Cornish knew we would, because we were enchanted by Louise's approach, which had a lot of Dalcroze's eurhythmics. It was based on Sigurd Leeder's training, because it was the Jooss-Leeder company when it was at Dartington. [Sigurd] Leeder was the student of Laban, as was Jooss, but Leeder was a person developing a training technique which didn't exist really in Laban's work. He adopted a sort of formula that was a little like ballet. That is, you warmed up, and you started at the bar, and then you came center floor, and then he had lots of studies which tested your dynamics, use of space, et cetera.

Louise taught very much in this style, and we loved it. But I loved her the more because she rode horseback so well [laughter] and she was thrilled to come out and ride with me at our house. The interesting thing is that after many years as a dancer she ended up in Yellow Springs teaching at Antioch, and when she was retired from Antioch she opened a riding academy and taught perfect dressage, et cetera. She only died last year.

I have a clipping, which amazed me, because I was called by Clement Crisp, the critic in London, who wanted me to give him as much information as I could about her for an obituary that he'd been asked to write. Well, it's a wonderful obituary. I learned more about her than I'd ever known. I couldn't give him a lot, but I led him to some people that I thought could.

Ronnie Johansson had a theory about movement. She thought it was all bound and rebound. Well, this was absolutely her personality, to move around. [laughter] We bounded around for three or four weeks, absolutely enchanted. This was Nelle Fisher and Kenny Bostock and Mary Louise Graham and a couple of others. We were close friends and were growing up in the Cornish School, had been for some time. Most of us were still high school students. Kenny was already working in the full-time school as an actor and a dancer.

Dance Classwork and the Challenge of Graham

Bonnie: Then came Martha. I'd already had Jooss later {something about later?} work, and then this odd bound and rebound stuff from Ronnie Johansson, which I enjoyed very much. It was very rhythmic. And along came Martha Graham, and that was absolutely overwhelming. She was tiny, terribly intense. There was already such an interest in her that Mark Tobey, the painter, took class. I remember his arches were just about as high as any I'd ever seen. [laughs] I didn't even know very much about Mark except

that he was a painter, and there were a number of other people on the faculty who took class with her. It was a beginning class.

I went every day and took class after school. I think within about three weeks I was absolutely overcome and overwhelmed. It was because she treated us as adults, she asked intelligent questions, shocking questions like, "What do you think a dancer's role in society is?" Nobody had ever asked us anything like that. My idea, when Miss Cornish met me one time, she said, "How do you think a dancer gets to be in a company?" I hadn't a clue. All I had was a sort of vision of a beautiful dancer in a spotlight in a big stage with pairs of eyes watching this marvelous moth in this spotlight. How you got there, I hadn't a clue.

So Miss Cornish was a little disgusted with me, and she said, "Well, are you going to join Fanchon-Marko?" Fanchon-Marko was a line dance group that was a commercial thing. By this time, almost every movie house of any size had a section that was vaudeville or music-hall stuff.

Bill: You mean like the Rockettes?

Bonnie: Yes, sort of that, before they just became totally movie houses. This was a transition. We had a couple of big movie houses, and the Fifth Avenue in Seattle regularly had quite good acts, including Ted Shawn, and that's where I saw Shawn and [Ruth] St. Denis first. Martha probably was in it, but I don't know for sure. I saw--well, I told you of the swami, the Egyptian swami who could cure headaches and everything under the sun by pressure points and things? And really some quite good acts.

So Fanchon-Marko was one of the big things. They did line kicks, just like Rockettes really. And then there was another level which was fancier, and they were toe dancers called the Albertina Rasch Dancers. They did sort of short ballets, and floated around in fancier gowns and stuff, and didn't do tap. I couldn't tap dance because my ballet teacher had said it was bad for your ankles, so he wouldn't let any of us tap dance.

This challenge from Graham occurred in so many levels in so many ways, because she was herself defining a training and a technique, understanding what your body was doing when you were moving, and so on. But she was also in a very curious period. She had spent almost a year when she left Rochester, she had been teaching for one year at the Eastman School of Music, which had a department of drama and dance which was headed by Rouben Marmouljian, who later became a very famous film director in Hollywood. He was very interested in Martha and gave her sort of full head to do what she wanted.

That's when she began actually creating her own work. She had three dancers who worked with her there. Everybody was a beginner and total amateur. But she had three dancers, and they went to New York with her and became her first little company. By this time, she was working hard to create a solo concert. This must have been--I think her first solo concert was 1926, so it was '24 and '25 that she was working.

During that whole year, when she was preparing the concert, she spent hours in studio trying to figure out, with what aesthetic information she had, what was the most economical way to express through human movement human emotions. She was enormously influenced by primitive art, particularly African art at that time. She was very aware of what Picasso and many other people were doing, and the influences on them. She went to the zoo, she read avidly, she talked with Louis at great length and so on. So the technique she'd been stripping away, looking at everything she knew and had learned, and sort of throwing out lots.

She came down to a technique that was almost entirely done parallel feet. We were more like bas relief figures, because there was a tremendous kind of distortion. Distortion became a very important part of this, because everything in those days and all I'd been brought up on was harmony, which meant flowing lines, and you fell rapidly without any abrasiveness at all into a kind of sentimentality.

An Aside on "Interpretive Dance"

Bonnie: There was this whole period in the twenties of interpretive dancing, where you interpreted music and danced in the woods, and dragged draperies around.

Bill: People in Berkeley, like the Quitzows [Florence Boynton's Temple of the Wings].

Bonnie: Yes, they belonged to a Duncan variety of this.

I'll interject a story here which I've always loved. John Martin--this is many years later, about seven or eight. I was Martha's assistant at Bennington, and that meant that I ate with the faculty, and Dorothy Bird too. We were the two assistants. I always sat at a table with John Martin, the New York Times critic, Louis Horst, and Dorothy. And usually someone else would sit with us.

Louis and John Martin had a rivalry going. One of them loved Strauss and the other adored Gilbert and Sullivan. So they tried

to prove to each other at breakfast, by bad singing of everything either composer had written, how superior one was over the other. It was a kind of a big joke, and they had great fun with it. And then one morning, John came in with a letter he had received with a little clipping or section out of a school prospectus. I think it had been stimulated by some article he'd written about education within universities, dance education.

Heidi: Because he was trying to educate his audience?

Bonnie: He was trying to encourage dance education, and to acknowledge that it existed, had for a period of time. He had a letter from a woman who had taught dance in a girls' finishing school. She extolled their program, but she didn't describe it, and told how many days a week the girls studied and how beautiful they were and all this stuff.

And then she had sent the prospectus, which was a little slim thing. He read the prospectus all the way through. And then he got to that section, which was a little like the Campfire Girls, which says, "Things you're to bring to college." The things you were to bring were so many towels and so many wash rags, and sheets, and uniforms and things like this. And at the very end, it said, "and three yards of chiffon for self-expression." I adored that, because it absolutely gave away what this school was like, full of sentiment and Quitzow-y sort of stuff.

This was all over the United States, and I'd even been part of it for a short time when I worked with Doris and Cornelia Niles, or Doris Niles--they were sisters. One was a Spanish dancer and the other was an interpretive dancer, and they taught at Cornish. I have a picture of me as Dawn, freckled face, pulling a scarf and looking just--[laughter] absolutely terribly healthy but sort of stupid. And my drapes always caught in the trees, and it was a mess. Because we danced in people's gardens, and so on. [interruption]

Heidi: I have another aside, I'll probably get in trouble for it.

Bonnie: Heidi wants an aside because she remembers a story from my ballet days. One of the first things I was cast in on toe shoe, because it took a long time to graduate to being a toe dancer, was a daffodil in some ballet that Caird Leslie made up. We had to have costumes. We wore yellow, sort of flouncey costumes, and our heads had little green things on them. But our legs had to be green stems.

Mother had bought me a pair of opera tights. There was no fabric in those days that stretched, except silk stockings, and

they were costly as could be. Dancers had to wear little panties, tight ones, and pull their opera hose up and have little garter belts that held the opera hose up under the panties. I was thrilled to have Mother buy me some opera hose. And these were to be dyed green, and my ballet shoes were to be dyed green.

But my mother, in her busy-ness with PTA et cetera, wasn't around, and I had a dress rehearsal. The tights weren't the right color, and I was worried about this. So I decided I'd better do something about it. I went down in the basement where my father had a big workbench, laid out the stockings, found a can of green paint that was just the right thing, and I painted the stockings and hung them up, and they dried, stiff as boards. When my mother came home and saw it, she said, "Well, I'm sorry, I cannot buy any more opera hose. You'll have to wear them." And wear them I did. I managed to get into them. Of course, they crackled and everything else. The first plié I took, the knees stuck out and stayed there for the entire ballet. [laughter] I wasn't a success. I was the knobby-kneed one.

Bill: I can just see it.

Bonnie: Yes. And my other big ballet part was Clara in "Nutcracker," and I told you about that, and the big thrill of having my mother and father take me out to dinner after the theater. I really felt special.

Bill: Was that such a treat, then? The family did not go out then?

Bonnie: Well, it was that I got very special attention from my family, and I had a pretty, new dress, that velvet dress, and they made a big fuss over it and sent me flowers and all that stuff. So those were two of the funny experiences in ballet.

Heidi: How old were you in each of those, or approximately, do you remember?

Bonnie: I think I must have been thirteen, fourteen, when this big change came.

A Performance with Graham at the Cornish School, and Costuming

Bonnie: Graham was invited to create--she was supposed to work with Jean Mercier, who was a French director trained by Capot (?). Capot is the absolute other side of the coin of Stanislavsky, the method approach. His approach was totally different. It was very intellectual, and you learned all your business--how you held your cigarette or whatever as an actor, how you rose, how you walked,

and so on--it was all set. Then you filled the form {?} in some magical way. He was an excellent teacher of that kind of thing, but Martha was much more a Stanislavsky approach, starting from feeling and letting the body express shape, become shaped by the feeling. So they didn't get along.

I can remember being at a reception for Martha to meet him, and he was a very excitable man, very charming man. He got so excited talking to Martha that he forgot to put his teacup into the plate, he put it right into space, and it fell crashing to the floor in Miss Cornish's apartment.

Martha decided she wouldn't attempt to touch the chorus or anything else. She would do something as an entr'acte. She chose five of us to be in it. About this time, I was taking four and a half hours plus a day.

Heidi: After school?

Bonnie: No, she didn't really begin this work until the summer. It was a long summer school, two or three months I think. I can remember being so stiff and so sensitive that I couldn't lay a sheet on my legs practically, they were jangling with work.

So she, having chosen us, began to work on a dance. Well, I thought for the time and the physical limitations she had--the Cornish theater is very small and we had to work in front of the curtain. There was a kind of pit covered with a board, and a little prompter's box, tiny little rise like this, so the prompter could look up at the actors and give them lines. Well, that somehow or other became the center, like, oh, the fire in an oracle's cave or something like that.

[end tape 5, side A]

[begin tape 5, side B]

Bonnie: She had a very small budget. That was typical of Cornish, of course. She had us enter sliding against the walls of the theater, in a marvelous sort of--you know, we were so used to two-dimensional work by this time--sort of sliding down the walls, very slow. And Louis, I think, must have written music for it. So it was very simple, probably very stark to everybody's mind. Then we came up two flights of stairs on either side of the stage, and onto the stage, and I don't remember much about the dance, except that it was a kind of ritual thing. I think Grace Cornell, being the most mature and the tallest of us, was probably a central figure.

But the costumes were extraordinary, and I learned a lot from her [Martha]. She made all her own costumes. To make these costumes, she bought yards and yards of cheesecloth, which I considered to be the world's worst stuff for a costume, because I was used to tulle or the heavier variety of stuff that isn't fancy silk tulle, for ballet skirts and so on. She didn't want that. She chopped the fabric, literally, in lengths, and dyed it, and twisted it so hard after she dyed it that it rolled back on itself into a roll, and then baked them in the oven, very slowly.

Then she took them out, and she fitted them on us, and they stuck to our bodies marvelously. The only thing was that not being silk--this was actually an imitation of the method used by the famous stylist, Fortuny, who still has--there are still Fortuny shops in New York, and Fortuny gowns were considered really marvelous evening gowns and special gowns, because he did it with silk. And of course, the silk would hold, and you had these tiny little pleats in it. So she created headdresses and fitted us into these costumes. She wouldn't let us sit down, though, because the heat of our bodies left a seat.

Bill: Like your knees.

Bonnie: Right, like my knees. So those costumes were what we performed in.

Not too long after this she had to go back to New York. By this time, Dorothy and I were going to meet her in the mornings--she lived in a little apartment near Cornish--to meet her and walk with her to school. We asked if we could help her pack when she was going, and she was delighted to have us help her. I think she was becoming rather fond of these two absolute goggle-eyed girls. Dorothy and I had become very close friends, of course.

She had invited us already to become members of her company. Well, Dorothy is two years older, and she could go off to New York. I had to finish high school in one year. I was a sophomore at the time, and had to do junior and senior year over the winter and the summer. I got a very wobbly degree. [laughs] I mean, I don't think it had everything I was supposed to have.

Martha had washed out her very pretty underwear, silk underwear, and it wasn't dry. So taking a hint from her baking, I carefully put it in the oven and turned the oven on, and quite well cooked her underwear. I was mortified. I burned the charming panties and the bra, and was just overcome. I spent months earning enough money to buy a replacement for this, which I sent to her, and she was very touched that I did this. She was

very forgiving about the whole thing at the time, and we saw her off.

Then I studied at Cornish with Lore Deja. Miss Cornish brought her from Germany, because this was the other major center for European contemporary dance. She was a young woman who had been trained by [Mary] Wigman. I don't know, she may have been a member of the company for a short period of time. She was absolutely devastatingly beautiful, with red hair and green eyes and a slender figure. She couldn't speak much English, so the consequence was that we followed her around. The only experience I've ever had with a trance was the fact that the drum beat steadily, like an Indian drum practically, and we were clunk, clunk, clunking across the floor and very light sort of steps, following whatever she did.

I got into some kind of trance-like state. I was absolutely sure that my head was up in the corner, or eyes were in the corner of the room, watching this whole procedure. I was sort of out-of-my-body feeling, which went on for quite a while, until she stopped this particular sound. I came together again, in effect. [laughs] Whether I was in a trance or not, it was just a very interesting experience for me.

Rooming with Dorothy Bird on 49th Street

Bill: She was there the year after Martha Graham left, and when you were finishing high school?

Bonnie: Right, so it was 1929-30, I think. Because I went to New York in '31. I finished school.

Martha, by this time, had decided that most of the company she had, she wanted them to go to the Neighborhood Playhouse to train as actresses and dancers. She and Louis both were teaching there. She couldn't see our coming all that distance without having a really good schedule for the day, because her company rehearsed at night. They all held jobs. It was a smallish company at that time.

So I arrived. We stayed at the Martha Washington Hotel, which met all parents' approval because it was a ladies' hotel.

Bill: Had Dorothy been there a year before you?

Bonnie: Dorothy had already been there.

Bill: And you met up with her when you came to New York?

Bonnie: She came to the West Coast in the summer each year, and of course, we wrote to each other constantly, and always signed the letters, "See you in New York." So Dorothy went East with me. I actually took the boat to Victoria, and Dorothy and I took the boat from Victoria to Vancouver and went by Canadian Pacific, because one of her family's best friends and one of Dorothy's sort of mentors was a lovely Captain something-or-other and his wife who had a beautiful house right on English Bay, on a point that stuck out. Dorothy and I, in that first summer that she came home, had pictures of us dancing in the garden.

Dorothy was absolutely overwhelmed by the experience, going to the Playhouse and working with Martha in the evening. So I started the same program. Dorothy and I lived then in a single room, which I think I told you about, on 49th Street, which was advertised as having a half-bath, which meant it had two little cots in it, single beds, and what had been a closet had been turned into a little hot plate place, and the half bath was you opened the door and stepped into a tub, and shut the other door out to the public. The loo was across the hall. Dorothy used to think it was very funny if I went with a very flimsy nightie out or something, and went to the loo, Dorothy would lock me out. [laughter] We played lots of tricks with each other.

Her mother, who was very English, a charming, charming person but impractical in ways quite unbelievable, kept worrying about our being cold, so she sent us tea cozies all winter. We had a collection of tea cozies! It was cold winter, so Dorothy and I took the tea cozies apart and made vests out of them [laughs] to be warmer.

Heidi: Then what did you do in the summer when it was so hot?

Bonnie: Well, we weren't in New York.

Heidi: I thought I remembered you saying you actually slept on the fire escape.

Bonnie: Well, that was later when I was in the Graham company.

Irene Lewisohn and the Neighborhood Playhouse School

Bonnie: I lived on fifty dollars a month, which was all my father could send. I had a scholarship that year, and began to make some quite good friends amongst the staff and the students in our courses. We had only one man at that time. The school was very new.

Bill: Who founded the Neighborhood Playhouse School?

Bonnie: Irene Lewisohn, whose family had build Lewisohn Stadium, and her sister Alice, who later became absolutely devoted to Jung and lived in Switzerland, married and lived in Switzerland, and I think was one of his major supporters. I think she's actually written something on Jung, I'm not sure.

Bill: Was her last name Lewisohn also?

Bonnie: Yes, Alice.

Miss Irene Lewisohn was sort of not a very talkative person, and she wore her hair divided in half and in a bun. She wore mink coats, and I knew that she was my sponsor, that she actually had given the money for me to study. She had been in Europe, and it was shortly after the beginning of school. She was coming to the school, so there was a kind of reception, she met all the students.

I was fascinated to meet her. She had done a lot of producing in the theater, but it was off-Broadway sort of stuff, and lots of very interesting things that were sort of multi-media, music, design, wonderful designers, and Martha, and Charles Weidman and people taking leading roles. They were produced at the Henry Street Playhouse.

So I was in line to meet her, and with my western vigor, I went to shake her hand and I slid all the way up to her elbow under her coat. [laughs] I was--I thought I was shaking this sort of fish. And I let it go, I was covered with confusion, didn't say a word. I think she was a bit startled.

She gave us lectures on the--what was it called? She had a wonderful title for this stuff. I can't remember now, I may have it written down someplace, because I took notes. It was really about the arts in relationship to the theater [speaking in high-toned accent], and she spoke in a very pompous sort of way. She had so many uh-uhs in her speech that I wrote all the uh-uhs, and the page just looks absolutely ridiculous, because I was writing this down. She was a pretty boring speaker. I think if I hadn't thought she was so boring, she might have had something to say, and I really didn't get it.

The Teachers: Drama with Gellendré and Choreography with Horst

Bonnie: We had very, very good teachers, and one of them was a man named Herbert Gellendré, who was the drama teacher. He came out of the Group Theater, which was then in existence. And a man named

Boleslawski, who was Russian, had established it. Out of that came the Group Theater later.

Heidi: This was in New York?

Bonnie: In New York. It was all very startling stuff, because it was a new, vigorous approach to training and dramatics, it wasn't elocution, it was something very different. Gellendré was trained there. He actually had taught at Cornish. It was very funny, because I was only thirteen or so, and he saw me coming down the hall one day, and I didn't know him, but he rushed up and greeted me. He thought I was the wonderful lead girl with Eva Le Gallienne, an actress, because we apparently looked so much alike that he thought I was her. I can't remember her name, but she was very, very well known.

We had a lot of improvisation training as well as scene work and so on, and work with Louis, which was tough and scary, and Martha's technique classes.

Bill: What did Louis teach?

Bonnie: He taught choreography, and actually it was the first teaching of choreography as craft that had been developed anywhere in contemporary dance. They didn't have it in ballet. So he was working it out. He based it on pre-classic dance forms, and then he would make us do the research, for example, from what known information existed, like Arbo's Orcusography {?} written in the 16th century, which is a dialogue between a monk and an apprentice, a very interesting dialogue in which the description of a pavane and a galliard and various dance forms are given. We had to reconstruct these as much as we could from the simple notation. It was a sort of written notation, like simple step, double step, so on. Not very profound, but amazing for the time.

Then he would make us take the essence--pavane comes from peacock and it's a processional dance, and it has great dignity. It's what often opened the court, a pavane, a processional. But then he would make us make a contemporary interpretation of this. I remember Anna Sokolow was his assistant, because she had come through the Henry Street Playhouse where Louis had also worked, I don't think as a teacher of choreography, but he knew her very well. And there was a school there.

Well, then my problem was that I wanted to be in Graham's company. Mrs. Morgenthau, who headed the school, was not in favor of my going to Martha's every evening. I think she thought that if I did, I'd drop out of school. But finally, I fought hard enough so that I was allowed to go I think three times a week to

the studio after school, and take class, and be there for rehearsal, so I became a kind of an apprentice for two years and learned a lot of the works, and stood in for people and stuff, and had classes daily at the Neighborhood Playhouse and at Martha's. I think Martha taught three times a week at the Neighborhood Playhouse, and then every night at the studio.

Bill: Where was the Neighborhood Playhouse?

Bonnie: It was at that time between 48th and 49th, on Madison Avenue.

Bill: So you lived very near there.

Bonnie: I lived on 49th, yes. We couldn't have afforded to pay fares at all.

Bill: And where was Martha's studio?

Bonnie: Martha's studio was at 49 East 9th Street, and fares were only five cents then. So I would go down.

Speech and Theater Studies

Bonnie: Anyway, I was really totally involved. But I did get to the theater. I remember going to see--we had a speech teacher named Mrs. Veazie {?} whose husband was the head of St. John's, that big church that's famous for allowing all kinds of dance and everything in it.

Bill: The cathedral, St. John the Divine?

Bonnie: Yes, St. John the Divine, the one on 125th?

Bill: Yes, in Riverside.

Bonnie: Well, at that time, it was quite square. She was a very good teacher, but she was a very funny character. She wanted us to see "Mourning Becomes Electra." You had to go in the afternoon, and there was a break for dinner, and you stayed in the evening. This was Eugene O'Neill's first play in which the characters have an inner voice and an outer voice. What they say and what they are thinking. So it proceeds in a curious fashion, but it was very overwhelming, and it was based in a curious way on the Greek play of Electra.

Well, I think I must have been exhausted from studying and so on. Anyway, I was so overcome emotionally by this that I couldn't stop crying at one point. Mrs. Veazie got very disturbed about

this. She thought I was going to have a breakdown, I think. [laughs] So she was very comforting, et cetera, and actually I got past thinking she was awful strange, because she was, but she also had another side.

I had a marvelous voice teacher. I guess Veazie was the second year. But the first year, I had Laura Elliot, who was a wonderful person. Laura Elliot had been an opera singer, and a very successful one--I saw beautiful paintings of her and so on--up to a certain point. Then when she got her first paid job she lost her voice. It was a psychological thing--terrified, I guess, I don't know what.

So she apparently went into analysis, and that was very new in the States. I don't know the whole history, because she was already a woman in her late fifties when I worked with her, but uninhibited by this time, you can believe. She would come into class and reach down and pull her skirt up over her head, and she wore bloomers, pull them down and say, "Now, I feel better," and start class. [laughter] She'd broken that inhibition. Or take her hat off and sail it across the room.

But she had worked out a whole set of exercises, et cetera, and eventually she had us come to her studio on 57th Street, where later Lillian Brandon (?) and Brandon Films was located, right across from Carnegie. She would have us sit on the corner of a table kicking our legs and shouting, "Evoi, evoi! (?)" which is Greek, I think, for joy, but I'm not sure. But she wouldn't let us use the bathroom in her studio, we had to go into the subway if we wanted to use it. She had these funny, funny hangups. But she was the teacher of Katherine Cornell and all kinds of people. Eccentric as she was, there was very sound teaching there.

She at first when I studied with her, and I was always ready with my assignments, she'd ask for somebody who was ready, and I would put my hand up and she'd say, "Sit down, you're a dancer." Just dismiss me, which made me very annoyed. But ultimately she began to take some interest. I would get a telegram from her, because I had no phone--by this time I was living in the Village--I had no phone, and she would send a telegram saying, "I have arranged for you to study choric speech at Columbia University beginning tomorrow." And she'd tell me where I was to go and so on. So meekly I would go, and it would be a week-long course in choric speech--

Bill: What is that?

Bonnie: Choric speech was a new phenomenon in England, and unknown in this country, in which you treat poetry like you would treat choral

music. So you literally write a score, in a sense, for it, and the deep voices and the lighter voices, et cetera, have different parts in it. It's almost like singing, but it's speaking. You really have to learn to enunciate and so on. We had what was supposed to be the most famous teacher of choric speech in England.

I was with nothing but speech teachers who were all twice my age, so I was the odd man out in this thing.

Bill: Oh, as students in the class, they were all speech teachers?

Bonnie: Yes, they were the students. These were speech teachers who had come from various places who knew about choric speech. We would do things like--who's the black writer, "boomalay boomalay boom boom boom--?"

Bill: Oh, yes, Langston Hughes.

Bonnie: No, it isn't Langston Hughes, it was an earlier one. And lots of English ones about parrots, and things that were lively kind of poetry that lent itself to this treatment. It was really very fascinating. I was bewildered the whole time, and when they talked about speech I didn't understand anything, because they were really thick into this whole thing of speech and training in speech. What little I had was related to acting. This was related to something closer to choral work.

So these were things that happened to me with her all the time. We had a wonderful woman named Margareth Dessoff who was a singing teacher. I remember the Germans invaded--must have been 1933, to go into Poland. She had left Germany because--I don't know that she was Jewish, but she had left it earlier, and she was already established as a very fine choral director. She came in so broken that day and apologized to us for Germany doing what it was doing. I think that was one of the earliest things that pushed me out to think about what was going on in the world and how it affected people. That and the fact that three months after I arrived in New York the banks closed, and the awareness of the Depression was even sharper at that time. One had to borrow from friends and share things and so on for quite a few days.

I acted in a number of plays, and was working with Graham very hard. In the second year of my time with Graham she took a contract, or rather, she agreed to create a work to be done for the opening of the music hall, Radio City Music Hall.

[Interview 5: August 14, 1994]
[begin tape 2, side A]

IV DECISIVE YEARS, THE PULL OF THEATER

The Neighborhood Playhouse School's Social Service Background

Bill: Last time we were talking about Neighborhood Playhouse. I was thinking about who the cast of characters might have been at that time, who you were working with.

Bonnie: Well, I think I did say that there was only one boy at the Neighborhood Playhouse when I arrived. I can't remember his name. He went on to be an actor, and the training was for actors. It was called "A Course in Art Related to the Theater," and this was a reflection of the philosophy of Irene and Alice Lewisohn who founded it.

The Neighborhood Playhouse had actually started--and its title indicates it--down in the East Village as a part of a whole larger program stimulated by some very amazing Jewish women who were very concerned about the arrival of Jews through pogroms and god-knows-what, coming in through Ellis Island and having no place to live and no education and no hope and so on.

And they started the Henry Street Settlement and the social work programs that evolved around them. It's a much more complex story than I could ever tell you, but one of the parts of it was the Henry Street Settlement. A settlement then was like a community center, in a sense, and they actually built a very fine little theater, and children came for classes in dance and the visual arts and music and so on.

And a girl like Anna Sokolow, who became a really very famous dancer--just a little kid from a really poverty-stricken family who got a chance to take classes--for her to get a kind of cultural education would have been utterly impossible. And for her to really become somebody. This happened over and over and over again amongst these kids.

Well, the Misses Lewisohn, particularly Irene, but her sister Alice joined her, loved--I think I told you they were daughters of the people who had built the Lewisohn Stadium and had known nothing but wealth all their lives. And they had aspirations to be theater-makers, writers and so on. So they wrote plays or else they found plays they wanted to produce, and they could afford to.

Somehow or other, ultimately these two interests of theirs, the social work, which was--. There was a famous woman in Chicago at Hull House, Jane Addams, one of the major figures, and there was another one in New York, and these women had connections.

And so Miss Lewisohn began producing quite extraordinary productions at the Henry Street Theater with Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman--all unknown at this time--as the main stars in music pieces like "Ein Heldenleben" {?}, the work of Jews--not only Jews, but the work of Jews in Europe, and this is in late 20's, who were persecuted in some cases, or whose works were never seen in the U.S. Anyway, they were so effective in this area, at Henry Street, that they decided to open, uptown, the Neighborhood Playhouse training school for actors.

Miss Lewisohn, being a philosopher, so to speak--. And Alice Lewisohn, I think I mentioned earlier, was one of the chief financial supporters of Jung and went back to live in Switzerland until the end of her life and supported his work as more a philanthropist, but also I think she wrote and--I just don't know.

Bill: I think she was even in analysis with him.

Bonnie: Oh, yes, I'm sure. So there was the spirit of Jungian interest in the unconscious, and also the sort of cultural inheritance of groups of people had a very big impact on them. So her philosophy was one that said you don't approach this just as drama.

And this was also a period when there was a great deal of thought going on which had been engendered by Isadora Duncan, Gordon Craig, the designer, musicians of various groups who were interested in what they considered the lyric performer, the person who could sing, dance, act, do anything that was asked of them so that they could perform in forms of theater that were as yet either undeveloped or uninvented.

So there was a sort of philosophy behind the work at the Neighborhood Playhouse which was completely consistent with what I'd learned at the Cornish School. All the actors took dance, and all the dancers took acting, and we all did production, and we all did everything.

- More on Faculty at Neighborhood Playhouse

Bill: Who was on the faculty at that time? Was it considered a faculty at Neighborhood Playhouse?

Bonnie: Yes, there was. And it was because of such a remarkable factory [laughter]--faculty--that something like that worked.

Well, there was Martha Graham teaching, as I remember, a minimum of three days a week, real mornings devoted to working with the actors. Louis Horst, who was a musician and Martha's music director, but he was developing--and it's really historic--the very first teaching of contemporary choreography, devising a way to develop the craft for this new art form and basing it on music.

I think I had mentioned earlier that we had learned pre-classic dance forms. We had to research them, produce them, in their--as near as we could as amateur researchers--original form from notations and existing records and photographs and actual notation systems for movement which were developed in the 16th, 17th, 18th century, and then to deal with the same form in a contemporary way.

And then the first year I was there, there was a man named Herbert Gellendré who was the head of theater, the director of the theater. He had actually taught at the Cornish School and had married one of the students at the Cornish School, a wonderful woman who still lives today, amazingly enough. She's in her 90's, I think, Mildred Huguen {?}. He had formed a kind of theater. He had been part of what I think was called the American Actors Conservatory, or something like this, which had been established by a Russian named Boleslawski. And he followed in the steps of Stanislavsky. So it was introducing a whole new methodology in the teaching of acting.

And out of that the Group Theater, which was a much more political and rebellious group, grew eventually, with Lee Strasberg as sort of the last variation on that theme. And his wife still actually runs that studio.

Let's see, who else? And then there was a marvelous woman, German, named Dessoff, Madam Dessoff--I never did know her first name--who really was probably more aware of what was going on in Germany earlier than any of the other members of the faculty. I know that when Hitler moved into Poland, she was absolutely distraught, she really couldn't teach that day at all. And we were so upset that she was upset, but we were naive as could be.

We did know that we had a Depression, we did know there were a lot of economic problems. A lot of the New York students were pretty politically aware. There was already a very strong working-class socialism that permeated the trade unions and the Lower East Side thinking, political thinking of many people.

And then there was the woman called Laura Elliott who taught speech. I told you she was Katharine Cornell's speech teacher. And she was mad as a hatter, a wonderful teacher, marvelous teacher. I've forgotten the man who taught production. He was a good person. I think he went on, went on and went to Yale, set up a program there.

The Cast of Guthrie McClintic's "Romeo and Juliet"

Bill: What was Katharine Cornell doing at that time?

Bonnie: She was doing "The Barretts of Wimpole Street." This was her great period, the late 20's and 30's. "Green Hat," all kinds of plays.

Bill: Did you come to know her through the Neighborhood Playhouse?

Bonnie: I came to know her in part because her husband came from the same high school I did in Seattle. [laughter] Guthrie McClintic was a student at Roosevelt High School in Seattle, and he had made a great friend of the dean of women--high schools had deans of women at one time--and they were great friends. Stayed in touch over the years. There was a wonderful teacher at that high school called Laura Jeanne Whitmeyer {?}, who taught speech and acting and I think that he actually had done some work with her when she was a much younger teacher.

But my whole association with Cornell came through Graham. It wasn't until I was in the company that that developed. And that was because Martha was asked to create the dance for "Romeo and Juliet," the McClintic production, with a fantastic cast. They all had--all the men had to be six feet and over because Cornell herself was about 5'11". And to be a fourteen-year-old Juliet, it was impossible to have little men around her. So she had Basil Rathbone as Romeo--which was a bit of miscasting, I think--but he was English, and he could do it and looked good. And a decent man, too.

And there was Brian Ahearne, who was a very well-known English actor, very good looking, a fun man--who did he play?--Mercutio. And Orson Welles played Tybalt, and he was all of nineteen and just finished producing Shakespeare in Chicago and knocking everybody off their feet with his production.

Bill: Was he over six feet?

Bonnie: Yeah, and how. And looked like a velvet devil, you know. He was a terribly irreverent actor, but he was an excellent actor. And

he loved doing things like--he had an entrance--the stage, by the way, was quite remarkable in that it was all stairs and steps like you might find in Rome in a particular area, so there were marvelous possibilities. And McClintic had a great sense of how to move choruses and groups of people and street scenes and stuff. And he had--I'll tell you the rest of the cast, and then I'll come back to Tybalt.

Another, Lord Capulet, was Moroni Olsen {}, and Moroni Olsen was one of the most famous of the Latter Day Saints actors who formed a company--I think it was his father who had a company, but I'm not sure of this, a company like it. Because there were touring companies in the West, just in the West, from Chicago west, they toured all over.

Bill: Latter Day Saints?

Bonnie: That was incidental, I think. But the Latter Day Saints supported the arts, which was unusual.

Bill: I didn't know that.

Bonnie: Yes, they did. And so you saw a lot in Salt Lake, opera and so on. And it was in one of these shows that Dad, a high school student, was a hired hand.

Heidi: Oh, right. He did the water.

Bonnie: Yes, it was Ben Hur, and they needed to have an ocean battle, so they got a bunch of boys and they put them on different spots, and they had to kick the canvas at different times. And they were so vigorous in it that one of the actors inserted a line about this ocean being, indeed, very rough, or something like this, to sort of calm the boys down. [laughter] Dad remembered this and loved it. They carried spears in various productions too, you know. They just loved doing those kinds of things. And they did this in every town they went to because it involved the community, you know, and was cheaper anyway.

But Moroni Olsen was about six feet four, and a lovely, lovely man, just a dear, dear man--big, with an immense voice. So when he came on in the scene to stop the fighting between the Capulets and the Montagues, his presence was certainly noticed.

And let's see, who else played? Oh, Dame Edith Evans was the nurse. She came from England to play. And Brenda Forbes played Lady Capulet. And all the dancers were students of Graham. At that time in the theater in New York, if you were a student of Martha Graham's you got a job in theater quicker than anybody else

because the dancers knew how to move and could take direction and stuff, even though they hadn't been in her company, necessarily. And so many of them came from the Playhouse so they had very good training. Anyway, the Playhouse had this quite extraordinary group of teachers, so our training was really quite extensive, with an immense emphasis on improvisation, which was a very new idea.

There is nothing better for an actress or a dancer to learn than to improvise, because it's an opportunity for them to make decisions, for one thing, and not just imitate a script but to ingest the information from the script and from any other sources they would research, and then to make it their own, in a sense. There are lots and lots of techniques for this, some better than others.

We did incredible improvisations that would build for a whole afternoon--on the Inquisition, for example. By the end of that, you know, you'd been slaughtered and you'd been--everything had happened to you. So it was extraordinarily revealing, and historically too, you just couldn't do these things without preparing in advance. It pushed us to read history, to know something about different historic periods, particularly theatrically-related episodes.

Improvisation: Out to Dinner

Bonnie: So I was becoming more and more of an actress in the course of this training. And by the end of the second year--I told you, the story, didn't I, of the very first year, of being taken out to dinner and ordering?

Bill: I don't think so.

Bonnie: My mother, who had been trained by Nicholas Murray Butler, and the other man whose name I can't think of who was in the government and set up these teaching teams to go out and raise the standards of teaching, she had gone to Seattle, but she remembered many of the people she'd worked with.

When she knew I was going to New York she wrote to several of them to, you know, keep an eye on me or introduce me to something, or whatever, anyway. One--and how she knew this man, I have no idea--one was a man who was very famous, and his law firm still exists, called Paul Kravath, and it has a lot of names after it. He was a very distinguished man, about six feet three or four, good looking and handsome and very, very full of style.

And for some reason--I have a suspicion that it was because he had an unmarried son--he responded to this letter he received either from my mother or from somebody else. I have no knowledge of how this all came about. And he sent me a charming note on official paper, inviting me to dinner, and his car would pick me up at a certain hour, return me at a certain hour, and so on.

Well, he also must have been very smart, because he knew Rita Morgenthau, the sister-in-law of the Morgenthau then head of the Treasury, Henry Morgenthau, under Roosevelt--it was all a big in-group bit--and she was the head of the Neighborhood Playhouse, a little bustling lady who had about as much real knowledge of the arts as the man in the moon, but her heart was in the right place. And she did know more about money than Irene Lewisohn did.

So I took the letter to Mrs. Morgenthau, and she got all of a-fluster at this, knowing that Kravath was this distinguished lawyer who handled largely theatrical things anyway. He was also famous for having beautiful women around him. And I, indeed, I think, knew an actress who was one of his entourage. I mean, he didn't sleep with them all, but they decorated his great, lavish apartment.

And I didn't know much about sleeping around anyway then at all, which is what bothered my father, I think, the most about letting me go to New York, that I was naive beyond belief. So Miss Morgenthau said something to Martha Graham about this invitation and that I must accept it, but "What was she going to wear?" Because all they'd ever seen me in was what would amount to jeans for today, you know, practically, because I had nothing in the way of clothing.

So everybody mustered. [laughter] Martha gave me pieces of clothes, and I was finally dressed up fit to kill. And the car was indeed sent. The chauffeur came up to the 4th floor and brought me down to the car. It must have been November or something, slightly cold, and I got in the car, this long sleek car, and I'd never been covered by a fur rug before [laughter] and I was covered by a fur rug. Here was sitting a charming man.

So they tootled off to some French restaurant, and I was in a dither. I had never ordered in a restaurant, I hadn't even been in Longchamps yet because it was too expensive. Milk was fifty cents a glass or something, and that was the Depression.

We got to the restaurant and were seated and carrying on what must have been an absolute--to him--complete comic opera kind of conversation. [laughter] But I was blithe enough not to notice that. Finally the menus were set in front of us. They were in

French, and any French I ever had escaped me at that moment. And he asked, would I like something to drink. I couldn't think of, all I--I couldn't say a whiskey and soda like my father might have said, something like that. So finally I noticed some A's and a few things like this, and finally I said, "I'll have an aphrodisiac." [much laughter]

I had no idea what an aphrodisiac was, but I think I'd read it in a book! Well, a sort of a strange expression went across his face and he decided he'd better step in, and he ordered something which was quite appropriate.

[end tape 2, side A]

[begin tape 2, side B]

Heidi: Do you remember what you talked about that evening??

Bonnie: I can't remember really. I think what he did talk about that I do remember was that he did have this son who was approaching forty and so on.

Bill: A little old for you.

Bonnie: He was kind of searching for a stable mate. I suppose the boy was imitating his father madly. So that was my last meeting with him. I never met with him again.

But I was taken back to the Neighborhood Playhouse, and everybody had stayed up to see me, Martha, Mrs. Morgenthau. I think they were hoping that it would lead to millions of dollars for the school. So Martha said, "Now, tell us everything that happened." I, by this time, was quite sophisticated [laughter] so I said, "Well, we started with an aphrodisiac." Martha said, "What?"--she thought things had gone too fast, too far--so then I learned of my great mistake. I don't think I ever told the rest of the evening at all because they were all in such a state of horror at what I had done. That was one of the funniest things! [laughter]

Summer Repertory Theater at Elm Lea, 1932

Bill: Where did you go in the summer those years in New York?

Bonnie: The very first summer, because they got interested in me as an actress, I was invited to be part of a repertory company up in Vermont, at Putney, in what is now the Center for International Living and at that time was called Elm Lea. It was owned by a couple of women who had this gorgeous big house and grounds around it. Herbert Gellendré, who was the director at the Neighborhood

Playhouse, invited us all to come and be part of this repertory company.

Bill: Like a summer stock company?

Bonnie: Like a summer stock company. And they were students--I mean some people paid and some didn't. I didn't pay, but I didn't get paid. I taught dance classes and assisted Martha's sister, Geordie Graham, who was an actress, direct dance work. We had a wonderful choral director, marvelous. Geordie created a Mexican corrido, a dance drama. And we had several plays, directed by Gellendré for the most part. He did an E.E. Cummings play, and the ladies that owned the place wouldn't allow it to be done because it was too naughty. [laughter]

That summer itself was quite distinctive because of the characters and actors who were there. That actually went on for a couple more years. I was only there the one year.

Bill: Who were the other people who were there that summer?

Bonnie: Herbert Gubelman {}, who is still a dear friend. Kenny Bostock, Geordie Graham. A lot of young men who were actors who went into war and were killed soon after that. Colfax Sanderson--a whole bunch of them. The one really brilliant one was John O'Shaugnessy, from the Northwest, from Cornish, who was a brilliant actor and director, neurotic, but fantastically gifted. He was there that summer. He was not a Neighborhood Playhouse student, but he was a graduate of the Cornish School and Gellendré knew him from there.

Bill: Your acting really was taking off at that point.

Bonnie: Yes.

Bill: Were you thinking differently about what you wanted to do?

Bonnie: I wasn't, but everybody around me was. Gellendré wanted me to go on and be an actress, and it got hotter and hotter during my second year. And Martha wanted me in the company, that's why I had gone to the Playhouse and so on. But she wasn't going to make up my mind for me, not in the face of Herbert Gellendré she wasn't.

I was just torn. It was the only time I think that I ever faced a--well, it was the first big decision I was having to make. He was offering me a role in the stock company. And I think I would have played, you know, still little-kids-off-the-farm kind of roles because I was not a sophisticated actress at all. But I

could do certain kind of humorous roles and a fair number of dramatic roles, but not a range, I was anything but sophisticated.

To The Bowery and Beyond

Bonnie: So it got into--by the end of my second year at the Cornish {you mean the Playhouse?} I had to make a decision because I was going to go West and visit my family for the first time. I hadn't been able to go home for two years because it was too expensive. And I had to make that decision before I left.

I think--I don't remember many details, but I remember the feelings of trauma and talking to people about it and so on. And then I just came down on the side of dance and said, "That's what I came for, and don't forget what you came for," and so on. And I felt very enriched because I did appear, even off-Broadway, in a couple of small plays that Miss Lewisohn {which Miss Lewisohn now?} produced.

Heidi: Do you remember which ones?

Bonnie: One was called "The Nursery Maids of Heaven." [laughter] How do you like that? It was not an astonishing play. I was a nun. It had its own charms, I suppose. I wasn't in a great many plays.

Heidi: Weren't you a Salvation Army person in one?

Bonnie: Yes. That was actually a play for the school. That was a Capek, a Czech writer. It was an antiwar play, and I played a Salvation Army girl, and we were always told to go have firsthand experiences. It got a little tricky if you were playing a prostitute. [laughter] But this was a Salvation Army girl, and so I headed right for the Bowery one night by myself. I lived down in that area anyway, and so I wasn't frightened by it.

But I hadn't been on the Bowery, and this was, oh gosh, 1932, I guess. It was just a street of people who were either on their way into jail or out of jail, and there were all kinds of "salvation" groups running soup kitchens and ice cream being given so you would join their church, you know, so the poor guys just would go from one place to another.

Bill: The price of a meal was sitting through a service.

Heidi: Right.

Bonnie: Yes, because it was warm, it was the only place they could be warm, off the streets. And they were the most non-malevolent

group I ever wandered around in. But I was wandering around looking like Goody Two-Shoes, probably, and a big Irish cop came up and said, "So what are you doing here?" And I told him what I was doing.

I said, "I'm an actress, and I have to play this role, and I don't know a thing about the Salvation Army and what they do for people that are down-and-outers, and so on." And he said, "Well, I'll show you," and he sort of took me by the elbow and led me through the whole of the Bowery and protected me, of course. And he took me into the places where they were giving out ice cream after so many prayers and things like that.

He took me into the biggest place which had been there for years, I guess, and really had been a church, or was a church. It had kind of an altar area and then pews, and there were men walking up and down the side with long sticks that had a little ball on the end. And if anybody fell asleep, they got a bop on the head, you know, they had to stay awake and hear the sermon. [brief telephone interruption]

He took me into this church-like place, and I whispered to him because I looked ahead of me and there were so many bald heads, I mean really shaved heads. I said, "Why are there so many shaved heads here?" And he said, "They just got out of the clink." [laughter] And they were there. And then there was a--they served sandwiches or something like that. So the way to these poor men's stomachs was warmth and food during this awful period. I don't know how much I was aided in my understanding of Salvation Army, but it was an experience that was worth having, altogether. I can't remember much about the play, but we did it, and that's it.

Heidi: But you also went to a revival place?

Bonnie: Oh, that was, yes, that's absolutely true, and it was in the same year. I was cast in something that was--like Aimee Semple McPherson. And I went to an Aimee Semple McPherson meeting in New York on the West Side, 38th Street, in a big old--oh, you know, one of these Pentecostal kind of temples. And it was so corny and so funny.

In fact, this may not have been Aimee Semple herself but another person, because I saw Aimee Semple McPherson in Los Angeles later in her own temple. And there they actually shut the doors after everybody was in. You could come late, but you couldn't get out early. And she was doing it all for radio--this was Aimee Semple McPherson. Her theme was the walls of Jericho,

and that included a violinist and a tap dancer and everybody that could relate to shaking the walls of Jericho. [laughter]

It was just a corny vaudeville thing, but people were totally taken in that were there. There were a lot of people in this maybe two-thirds-full auditorium, and ushers going up and down. Finally the big thing is that she draws them all to Christ, which means they have to stuff their way down the aisles and kneel in the aisles.

I went around the side, and here was a woman holding her hand like this [indicating] and vibrating like mad, and I got close enough to hear her say, "I got Jesus by the foot, I got Jesus by the foot." [laughter] Aimee Semple was also hollering into the radio, saying, "Look at all the thousands of hands that are coming," and I looked around and there were no hands at all, just a few feeble hands that were practically shoved up by the helpers. So, this was an experience I had both in the East and in the West Coast.

To Longchamps

Bonnie: The other funny thing that relates more to poverty than anything else was Dorothy and I finally worked our way up the end of our first year--I guess we were about to part for the summer--and we decided we would go to Longchamps. We walked by it every day, and it was the fanciest of restaurants. I only later learned that waitresses paid for their own uniforms to work in Longchamps and only got tips. Anyway, they had a bunch of male servers, waiters, who'd been there for years, so everything else was the froth around it {meaning?}.

Longchamps in those days was full of potted palms. Potted palms were de rigeur for any big restaurant, because you had to sort of search around and find people behind potted palms. Very Hollywood. Dorothy and I went into one on 49th, if I remember, just around from the school, and I had forgotten that my coat, which was my winter coat, had to be gotten into with great care because the arm lining had come separated, and you had to waggle your way in the right way or otherwise you came out with mitts.

And I got into the restaurant with having no idea that a waiter would help me take my coat off and hang it up. He did it with a disdain as if he was handling the dirtiest handkerchiefs in the world, and hung it to one side. And we had almost nothing to eat and it broke our bank. I remember that milk was fifty cents or a dollar there, whichever. It was just incomprehensible, because you could go next door to a drug store and get it for ten

or fifteen cents. And I was largely living on milk shakes at this point because I hadn't gotten used to eastern cooking.

So, when we were getting ready to leave I whispered to Dorothy, "You watch now, when he's away, tell me, and I'll get my coat." And so I waited till he disappeared, and she signaled me, and I got my coat and I plunged my arm in just as he took the shoulders, and I came up with two fistfuls of lining. [laughter] We stood there with everybody--of course, my notion--everybody in the restaurant watching while I dismembered the thing again, which had two or three linings. I mean it wasn't just simple. It was really crazy.

So those are just some of the anecdotes of the Neighborhood Playhouse while I was there.

Bill: In the second year, did you live with Dorothy also?

Bonnie: Yes.

Bill: But downtown.

Bonnie: If I remember, partway through the year, because I had battled with Mrs. Morgenthau to be allowed to be apprentice in Graham's company, I went every evening to take class, or as many evenings as I could.

Bill: Starting in your second year?

Martha's Dancers on Stage at Radio City Music Hall

Bonnie: Well, in the first year I started it, actually, and by the second year I was really an apprentice in the company, and Martha had-- this must have been '31, I guess, because it was the opening of the Radio City Music Hall, and Martha had a contract to perform the opening two weeks at the Radio City Music Hall. Roxy, who had founded the Roxy Theater a few blocks west of there, was the head of this huge new theater which was his dream.

You know the tunnel coming out here with the rainbow? [Highway 101, Waldo Grade] Well, the stage was at least twice as wide as that and had an arch, kind of a rainbow arch to it. It was an immense stage and it had the latest paraphernalia. You could raise that whole part of "Aida," with a hundred warriors and two or three horses, in the back half of the stage from nineteen feet below or something, and have it ready when you opened the curtains.

The front section could go down, pieces of it could go down, and so on. It was an incredible thing. The whole orchestra pit went down, and the musicians got on and came up. If they didn't pull in their violin they had half a violin when they got to the top. [laughter]

Martha created two works for this. Everybody was--it was to be in the form of an English music hall. English music hall was a marvelous thing we didn't know in this country. We knew vaudeville, which was a bunch of acts. But in music hall everybody was a stellar performer. There were the best comedian, the best juggler, the best whatever it was. This was what Roxy wanted, and he hired everybody under the sun including Harold Kreutzberg from Germany and Martha and anything he heard that he thought was top dog stuff.

But he never wrote contracts for anything that didn't come overseas because his word was supposed to be gold. And he only wrote contracts for Kreutzberg and people coming from overseas because the U.S. required that they have some kind of protection.

We rehearsed like mad. Now, we danced on front of the stage while "Carmen" was being taken off the stage, and that included a horse and just an incredible number of people on this stage. And here were ten of us stretched 110 feet across this area, and I don't think we had a depth of more than ten feet. Martha did two choruses, Greek choruses really, essentially. And our best review came from a sportswriter who understood running [laughter], because we ran miles on that stage.

The very first thing that happened was that we were lying absolutely flat on the stage. We had to get out in the dark and lie on--and I didn't perform every night because I was a sort of a stand-in--but lie on two metal pieces. And when I looked down I could see nineteen or twenty feet below with all the horses and everything being moved around, and these things were unsteady and I got just absolutely seasick.

The opening was a chord or a strike from Louis, and the drummer starts a vibrating thing--it was specially written music--and we sit up, you know, startled. And that was fine for the dress rehearsal, the dress rehearsal took two days, and the opening night, that went off too, but the show didn't end until 1:00, and Roxy got fired that night so it meant that we had no job because we had no contracts.

So we had to come in every night as if we were--our lawyers advised--as if we were hired, we expected to be performing, et cetera, and we went to the dressing room, we did the whole thing,

and then we never performed because they had chopped back this thing to mostly overseas people who had contracts.

W.C. Fields was one of the performers, and Ray Bolger used to come and stand and watch us. He was just a solo tap dancer at the time. And he'd keep saying things like, "Gee, someday I'm going to do a full show."

The second night we actually did perform. Louis brought the baton down, and there wasn't a sound. And he looked over, and the drummer was sound asleep on the drum, he had not had any sleep for forty-eight hours, poor guy, because of the two-day dress rehearsal. Incredible sort of thing. We finally did get just enough money to cover the one week. It was the only money any of the company had, so we had a party. And I remember that the whole Graham company got drunk. It was really funny. It was so sad, the one job they had that ever paid and it fell through. Really funny.

Bill: So Radio City Music Hall started as a music hall, not as a movie theater.

Bonnie: No, not at all. They had developed the Rockettes and the Albertina Rasch dancers and they had full shows, real Busby Berkeley type things for years. And then they brought in film because they really couldn't sustain those big shows.

Bill: Did Roxy get fired because he was too grand in what he was trying to do?

Bonnie: I think so, and because he--he really blew it in so many ways. I told Heidi this years ago--they lost a grand piano, they literally lost a grand piano. [laughter] And it was during the dress rehearsal period, this two-day rehearsal period, because when you went downstairs where everything got unloaded and rolled off to the sides, they just kept pushing this out under 5th Avenue, and they found it later way under 5th Avenue. People just kept pushing it out of the way because they hadn't finished Radio City Music Hall, or hadn't finished, you know, where this ice-skating and all that stuff is now. It was just amazing. There must have been a million stories like that.

[end tape 2, side B]

[Interview ?: August ?, 1994]
[begin tape ?, side A]

Back to Bonnie's Varied Roles in "Romeo and Juliet"

Bill: We were talking about the production of "Romeo and Juliet" with all those stairs, and the entrance of Orson Welles.

Bonnie: Well, the whole production for me was very exciting. Graham choreographed the dances, and it was a very opulent performance--I mean costumes were stunning, but they weighed forty and fifty pounds each and getting dancers to handle these heavy costumes when they turned and not knock over the furniture or the artists next to them!

The whole thing came off really very, very well. And it set in to a kind of run, and it was to go out of town first. So we went I think to Toronto, Buffalo, three or four towns, and I went with them. I was released from the company for a week, two weeks, ten days--something like that--to go with them.

Heidi: So you were actually already in the Graham company.

Bonnie: In the Graham company, yes. And since many of them had been my students one way or another at the Graham studio or at the Playhouse--that is, at the Mob {?}--I gave a class every day and anybody who wanted to could take it. Basil Rathbone turned out to be a real balletomane. He knew all the major ballet dancers, he knew all--I knew nothing compared to him. He'd come watch the class, and there was a certain respect for the fact that I was disciplined like actors rarely are to, you know, do something every day on technique.

And then all of a sudden, I was called--. Oh, I was going to tell you one other story, and that had to do with Tybalt, with Orson Welles, who was young and full of beans and brilliant, and also corny as could be in the next moment, sort of a Charles Laughton kind of character, mercurial to say the least.

For instance, he was supposed to come up the flight of stairs in a most menacing attitude to take on somebody with his rapier, and they were to reflect horror, et cetera, et cetera, at this impending disaster. And so as he'd get up to the top of stairs, he'd cross his eyes [laughter] and look at everyone. Well, they could hardly respond! He put them in such difficulty over and over and over again, challenging their concentration. They could have killed him. But he would do that over and over again.

And because I gave notes after practically every performance to the dancers, people like Cornell began to ask me for notes for themselves, which absolutely floored me. What was I doing, telling Cornell, you know, what to do next, or what to shift or what to modulate. But I decided, okay, if they want it, I'll get it to them. So I did.

I had some wonderful discussions with her about handling a particular prop, or a discussion about how one uses space, how one actually uses it, you know. If somebody says you're to go from here to there you can go from here to there a hundred different ways, and each of those different ways has a different meaning, which she totally understood. I mean, she was already involved in this. So there were lovely exchanges, things she told me of her experience in the meaning of movement, gesture.

I think it was she who told me of the time she had seen Eleanora Duse, and I believe the play is "The Sea Gull," or else "The Wild Duck," I can't remember. What's the difference?

Bill: Well, one is Chekov, and one is Ibsen. [laughter]

Bonnie: Well, that makes a difference, doesn't it! I can't remember which it was. In any event, at the very end I think she just, her son commits suicide or dies or something, and she is left alone on the stage. Duse played it entirely with her back to the audience, and what happened was that she slowly allowed a shawl to drop off her shoulders, which--the slow descent of the shawl was like shutting down life for her. It was just fantastic. I heard many wonderful things from different actors in the course of that production.

But when we were on tour they got very frisky, and they also began teasing me because I was very bossy about them getting their parts right, et cetera, et cetera. And I was Martha Graham's representative, and I took myself seriously, and so on and I kept saying, "You have to know where you are every minute of this play because everybody else depends on you. You can't just shift two feet here or two feet there. You've got to be in the same spot."

So I came on stage--we had a wonderful stage manager, he had a great sense of humor. He called me over one night when I got there about 7:15 or so, and he said, "You better get to makeup, and fast. Get your makeup on." [brief interruption] Well, I wasn't in the play. He said, "I have a costume for you, you have to stand in."

The only small people in the whole thing were pages, and they had a bunch of small pages. I can remember one of the pages--who

later became a good friend and a very fine actor--didn't bring his jock strap. So Guthrie McClintic tortured that boy. He made him walk up and down the stage in his page outfit--he was looking at every costume--and he'd make him run, and he'd make him walk. [laughter] The kid was trying to cover himself up with his hat and it was no good at all.

Heidi: Who was that?

Bonnie: I don't remember the actor's name. He later became part of the Repertory Playhouse {fuller name?}, more of an administrative man. I think he went to Hawaii or someplace.

Anyway, I got into this page's outfit, and I said, "What is this?" He said, "Well, you know every place on this stage, just stay out of everybody's way. We've got somebody missing, and you have to fill in this space." Well, I was totally shattered by this, because it's quite one thing to tell everybody, and the other to be in the position.

I was standing on stage, you know, being pugnacious because I was a member of the Lord Capulet's family, and the others were Montagues. And they were starting up the stairs at us in a battle, early in the play, and Moroni Olsen, this wonderful big man, walked in, and I was right in his way. So he just picked me up by the scruff of the neck and set me aside [laughter] like I was a paper doll. The cast could hardly play the rest of the act because they were so delighted that I'd had my comeuppance. [laughter]

At the end of the scene, the stage manager came roaring on stage, and they all were just giving 'way to giggles and so on, and they didn't know McClintic was in the house. And he walked in and he said, "Keep that business." [laughter] So I was vindicated.

Heidi: You may have been humiliated, but it was a good moment in theater.

Bill: It was improv.

Bonnie: It was improv, really. Well, I went on with that. I played Lady Capulet a few weeks later because Brenda--Edith Evans' husband became ill and died, actually, in England, and she flew over to be with him. And Brenda had to take her part overnight. She was the understudy for Edith Evans, who was a fantastic actress, by the way, a great British actress. And she was so homely; and she had a cowl over one eye, she'd been born with a cowl over one eye, so her eyes were slightly cockeyed. She didn't have anything going

for her in terms of beauty.

Bill: Just talent.

Bonnie: Her talent was incredible. Occasionally I'd sit with her in the auditorium when Guthrie was directing. And she'd make me look at how he directed. He would get up on the stage, and he'd ham like mad, some business that he wanted done. And you'd think, "Oof, he's the awfulest actor. How is he going to get anything out of this?" She said, "Don't you kid yourself. He is being a ham because they'll feel so much better, they'll feel they can do it properly, where he isn't doing it properly." There were little insights like this that were very helpful. You could learn so much from somebody like that.

Bill: It's interesting to think of the interplay between being a choreographer with dancers, and being a director with actors.

Bonnie: It's a very similar process, and many people make the move, like Herbert Fosse {Lucas Fosse?} was a choreographer, and he became outstanding on Broadway. Yes, I think they are terribly alike.

Well, I was telling you about my moment as Lady Capulet. I had to come into the theater like, boom, and get into this heavy costume. And my partner, Mercutio, was Brian Aherne, and he was really sweet, he sent me a telegram saying, "Put your Bonnie foot first," or something like that. But we had to make a very dramatic exit. My costume was a gorgeous bronze satin, beautiful, and I had to precede him up a set of stairs, step out and down some stairs, and off the stage.

But nobody had remembered to put the stairs there on the other side. So I went off into space, very gracefully, and Brian came right off after me and landed right on me. I was just a mattress for him. He got up, furious, mad as hell. And that was my introduction as Lady Capulet, I was a squashed one. [laughter]

Bill: Were you injured?

Bonnie: No. I had so much costuming on, I was a mattress, actually, for him.

For quite a few years in little ways we sort of kept in touch, and I was very drawn to theater. I would have loved to have been able to go on as an actress. But it takes a lot of work and a lot of skill to keep it up and to keep growing into a character actress, you know, defining yourself as an actress.

So I really didn't go on with the acting at all. I helped Martha with a few other things, but nothing as big as that. That was the most important. And Anna [Sokolow] did a lot of assisting for Graham.

Bill: Bonnie, I want to get this clear. You started dancing with Martha Graham in New York in your first year at the Neighborhood Playhouse School, but you were an apprentice in your second year?

Bonnie: I was an apprentice, actually, at the sort of the second half of my first year, because I got Mrs. Morgenthau to agree that I could.

Heidi: She was your sponsor, right, Mrs. Morgenthau?

Bonnie: Well, she was the head of the school. And it was Irene Lewisohn whose money it was, but she was mentor for each of us, you know, because there were only twenty in our class, I think, at the most. So there were small classes. You got an awful lot of individual attention.

Bill: And then after your second year at Neighborhood Playhouse, were you then a full-fledged member of the company?

Bonnie: I went directly into the company and immediately started teaching for Graham, assisting her, first as a demonstrator, and then she had me go with her to demonstrate and to teach if she didn't turn up. At Sarah Lawrence College, at 92nd Street Y--all over the place. Wherever she would start something, she always knew that she would have difficulty in being consistent. But anybody she took along to assist--.

Artists' Model, and Wilhelm Reich's Orgone Therapy

Bonne: I wasn't the only one that she used that way in different places. But I was a principal teacher. And I had the magnificent top salary for a couple of years of \$11 a week, professional salary. [laughter] I worked as a model, mostly posing for artists in the mornings.

Heidi: Who did you pose for?

Bonnie: Eugene Speicher, Walt Kuhn--hmm, I would have to get a {what? a list? could you?}

Heidi: You posed for the whole--what was it, the Steig family?

Bonnie: Oh, I went to the Art Students League. I hated it because the students were so snide. They were so puritanical. One of them goosed me going down the stairs after a session, and I turned around and hit him so hard with my handbag and then marched into the office and reported him. I was furious, absolutely furious. Carpio {Caravaggio?}--there were a whole group of the painters who did women, lots of flesh, and they were delightful, each in their own ways.

The hardest one for me to work with was a man whose name I can't think of right now, who had a class--lots of dancers posed for him--he had a class, and he always had the "Bolero" going, slow. And there's nothing harder than to pose quietly--and you pose for twenty-five minutes, and then five-minute rests, and you're paralyzed when you get out of that position. And here was this rhythm going all the time, and you wanted to move, and it was very hard. But he was a dear man.

And then the funniest group I posed for was the whole Steig family, William Steig that did "The Lonely Ones."

Bill: He's still doing cartoons for "The New Yorker."

Bonnie: They were a highly neurotic Jewish family, very into--oh, you know, what was the thing they had, that I got into for a little while inadvertently? William Reich. They were all patients of Wilhelm Reich.

Bill: Orgone therapy.

Bonnie: Orgone therapy. And they had orgone boxes all over the place, [laughter] and they all got together as a family because they were all artists, all drew. They liked to draw dancers because they made them practice quick sketching. They were fun, they were really fun. They were neurotic as could be, but wonderful Jewish sense of humor, and so they were great fun to work for.

Bill: Well, Reich had a strong interest in the body, it was his idea of body armor.

Bonnie: He did. He was very funny because he was a patient of Dr. Kulka's, and his family were patients of Kulka's. And he would send Kulka patients of his who he said had cancer and Kulka said, "They don't have cancer." And he'd send patients who he said didn't have cancer, and they did have cancer. [laughter] Things like that all the time.

I was teaching {when?} in a school called the Hamilton

School. It was a pre-primary and primary school filled with the Rockefeller children, a really tony place. I was the rhythms teacher--which the children couldn't say, so they called it the "ribbons teacher." A wonderful woman had taught there for years, and the man who was the head of it was this sweet sort of matriarch--patriarchal--figure, and everybody was a patient of Reich's or in a group or something.

Well, I had a sinus headache one day because of a cold. And I had little ones, and little ones always have to be picked up, so you're bending over and picking them up and giving them a hug and stuff like this. I bent over and came up saying, "Oof, my head," and in two seconds somebody was there with an orgone-ized packet of earth that I had to keep on my head that had been in the orgone box.

There was an orgone box in every classroom in that school. The children just thought they were outhouses, but they didn't use them that way. But they thought they were play things. They were lead-lined telephone boxes, really. That's about what they looked like.

And I was always being encouraged to become a Reichian disciple. Well, I found it difficult, but I talked to Ernst about it, who knew him personally and described him in a way that I thought was wonderful. He said, "He is one of the rare paranoid people who has justifiable paranoia because he is persecuted and has been persecuted." Ernst gave me a lot of his writings because he'd published a lot of stuff.

Bill: Who was Ernst?

Bonnie: Ernst Kulka, who was my physician, and physician for a lot of the dancers in New York. And he said, "Well, read some of these." At the time I had a good friend named Al Marshak who was a scientist, a biochemist, and doing all kinds of stuff in relationship to cancer research, but at Woods Hole, of all places. And I tried to read this stuff, and there would be graphs, purported graphs, but they had no coordinates. You couldn't tell what they meant at all. It was a scriggle going across the page, you know. I got him to read them, and he said, "Well, there are brilliant ideas in here, but so undisciplined that it's almost useless."

His [Reich's] early work in armor and armoring was extremely useful. And his character work, development of character, was very useful. And those were the things he wrote on. But he was a little goofy--

Bill: Oh yes, yes.

Bonnie: --there is no two ways about it.

Heidi: So did you meet him? Reich?

Bonnie: No. He was in jail. He got stuck in jail and died in jail for selling orgone boxes or something like that. It was more complex, but it was really sad. But he was pretty paranoid, it's true.
[tape interruption]

Driving West, Through Taliesin, 1933

Heidi: That summer after the Neighborhood Playhouse--you'd been there for two years, and when you went back you had decided that you would come back and be a member of the Graham company. You had already decided before you left?

Bonnie: I did.

Heidi: And somehow you finally had enough money to go home for the summer.

Bonnie: The reason I was able to go home for the summer was my father bought a car in Detroit. He was in the automobile business, and so he bought a new car. And I took a bus to Detroit and picked it up, and then I would drive it west.

What I can't be absolutely clear about in my memory now--that would be '33, the end of my second year at the Neighborhood Playhouse, and I don't remember who went with me. But I always had two dancers who were useless who went with me, who didn't know how to drive, they didn't know how to pump gas, but it was fun to have them, in any event. [laughter]

As I remember that time, I went north through North Dakota and Montana, and fairly direct. I can't remember events on that one. I had so many trips ultimately back and forth across the United States, driving, that there are absolutely ridiculous things that happened on different trips. But this was my first. I think I must have had Eloise Jordan and Peggy Rourke with me, and Eloise's boyfriend whom she ultimately married, Eddy Ryan.
{check names?}

We went through the north, as I said, I remember we got into Minneapolis--this much I do remember, and I think there are some photographs of that--and it was so hot. I don't think I'd ever

experienced Middlewestern heat like that. There was a pond, a little lake, in the middle of Minneapolis, and we just stopped the car and went in the lake and had a lovely getting wet, not much more.

I also remember that we must have gone by Taliesin, Taliesin East, which was Frank Lloyd Wright's headquarters, just outside Madison, Wisconsin--things are coming back. We stopped in Madison, because there was this student I knew, and stayed at their family summer home for a day or two and then went to Taliesin. I had a sort of semi-boyfriend who was his [Frank Lloyd Wright's] assistant, a chief student, really, at Taliesin.

Taliesin was a marvelous experience. As you approach this hilly, really beautiful rolling country--Wisconsin's gorgeous country--the rooflines carry out the lines of the hills, you know, he wanted everything to be sort of integrated. I can't remember the boyfriend's name--Edward Stessel, or something like that, a perfectly findable kind of name because he became independently a very well-known actor--but he met us and took us all around.

I met Frank Lloyd Wright, walking with his wife. He was already pretty old, but wore his great hat and he had this sort of aristocratic manner. He often wore capes or carried a cane. There were wonderful workrooms, and where the students lived, one of the things that fascinated me was--he was six feet tall, though he was shrinking about then, but the boys, many of them, and I don't remember any women architects, were various size, some pretty tall ones--and they took me through this sort of dormitory area where there were many bedrooms and I don't think the ceiling was more than 6'2".

And then when you walked into the living room, and it only probably went to twelve feet, you felt like you'd been exploded in space. It was beautiful, sort of big space, et cetera, et cetera. So you came from this little tunnel into brilliance and light and so on. And he built his own furniture and stuff too, which was exciting.

Every Saturday or Sunday, I don't remember which, there was some kind of an affair in a little theater that they had. And Frank Lloyd Wright and his wife sort of officiated. I think it must have been a musical evening or something that we went to. But we all had dinner together, and then we went in to watch this in the little theater and the whole thing had a lovely sort of romantic, other-worldly feel to the thing. I was absolutely intrigued with the whole visit. Taliesin West was just being conceived and developed, and that was in the desert near Tucson.

But it was exciting to meet him because he was one of the architectural, global thinkers. He was thinking well beyond city planning, it was metropolitan planning, it was huge cities. He had, somewhere in that period, been invited to the Soviet Union to plan a new city for the Soviets. They got into some kind of a panel. He did do drawings, and those still exist, I believe. But nothing ever came of it, and they couldn't have, I mean the Marxists and he were about as opposite as you could be.

But I began then to be aware of him and to love certain funny stories that I would hear through my friend, one being that he had a client someplace in northern New York who he'd built a house for. He built houses in terms also of where the furniture goes, and what was the nature of the furniture, even if it wasn't going to be his furniture. These clients weren't home, and he stopped by to visit, and he changed all the furniture around. [laughter]

Bill: The way it ought to be.

Bonnie: Right, where it ought to be.

Through him I became--I mean through Edward, really--I became aware of Neutra in Los Angeles. I began to be aware of architects, and the impact of architecture in a way that I'd never thought of on human thinking, both as a reflection of human thinking but also of extending it imaginatively.

And then we went on, and we were living on absolutely nothing, sleeping in motels because we didn't even have any equipment {you mean to camp?}. We followed a sign to a country kitchen. It was a farm--I don't think I've ever been in a country kitchen and country veranda quite like it, an enormous house, one of these big, porched houses in the middle of gorgeous green fields and so on. The woman was a superb cook, and she'd gone from feeding the hired hands to sort of developing this wonderful, real Middlewestern kitchen. And the food was superb.

And you know what I remember most?

[end of side A, side B blank, will we get the video transcript?]

Missing Tape

[Interview ?: August 17, 1994 ?] [begin tape 3, side A] (starts mid-sentence, continued from some other tape, perhaps the tape is on video?)

Bonnie: I was sweating underneath this stairway, and finally I did actually drag out this poor dead little puppy that came all the wrong way and everything else. And then Martha became absolutely the nurse for {?}, feeding her Friskies and drops and so on. {is this Tookie?} And she finished her cake {missed this part of the story} [laughter] Well, I loved it. It was really funny.

Bennington Summer School Students, 1934, and an Aside on Horst

Heidi: What year was that?

Bonnie: That was 1934. [Talking about summer school program at Bennington.] The first year I think it ran six weeks and they had two weeks of Martha Graham, two weeks of Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman, and two weeks of Hanya Holm.

Heidi: But that year, you weren't there.

Bonnie: No, I wasn't there.

The next year they had Martha in residence and Doris and Charles in residence, if I remember correctly, for the whole six weeks. I don't remember--Hanya I think began going out to Colorado, so she was carrying her message in a different way. I could be wrong about some of these things because my memory is very foggy.

I do remember Martha saying, 'cause all the husbands of the dancers wanted to live on the campus, and she wouldn't have any males on campus, they had to live off campus, and there was a wonderful photographer--

Heidi: Martha could dictate that none of the males could live there, or that was the policy?

Bonnie: Oh, she influenced the policy. [laughter] There was a marvelous photographer, Thomas Boucharde, {?} who wanted to photograph the whole summer. And he wanted to live on the campus so he could get all kinds of different kinds of shots. Martha knew he was a roué so she said, "I'll approve Thomas living on the campus, but only if he has a cowbell." [laughter]

Bill: What was the relationship between Martha and Louis? Were they lovers?

Bonnie: Well, they had been, years ago. I don't think they were lovers--I know it was very, very platonic at this point.

Louis was like a sounding board for Martha. When we went to dinner, it was fascinating. Martha would start talking to Louis, to us, and she would fly some wild ideas, and they literally bounced off his chest. He'd listen to them, and if they had a lot of sense to them, he'd get very interested. If he thought they were silly, he would say, "Oh, come on, Martha, you can't do that," and sort of bring her down to earth. But he also would come with things--having seen an art exhibit, something that "fed" her, he was really fantastic at that.

Heidi: Was he with her for a long time though?

Bonnie: He was the music director at Denishawn and he was the person who encouraged she and Doris and Charles to leave Denishawn and go do their own work. He had utter faith in her artistry. He wrote most of her music in the beginning.

It's quite amazing--when you look at her solo programs in 1926, which was her first solo program, there must have been fourteen dances, because dances were never more than five or seven minutes long. And they were--she was still very Denishawn. It was a dance called "The Maid with the Flaxen Hair" or "Tanagra Figurine" or "Spanish Something-or-Other." They were short things. Then she began to do things that were more serious. She did something of a Jewish woman at the Wailing Wall because there were very early Zionist ideas afloat at this point. And Jewish people were just floored--she wasn't Jewish--because she so caught the feeling of the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem.

But those summers [at Bennington] were very productive on so many levels for so many people because it was like a group of scientists going together for totally new knowledge, and then going back and, you know, dealing with this new knowledge and trying to apply it and use it throughout the U.S. Because it was PE teachers, mostly dance teachers within PE departments. Many of them were PE teachers with a passion for dance, not great dancers, but terrific in the head.

Heidi: Like who? Who did you know those summers?

Bonnie: Helen Alcar. {?} Oh, practically every head of every dance department of a certain age--Ruth Murray.

Bill: Who were the Michigan people?

Bonnie: Ruth Murray was the big one, wonderful. Some of them were superb dance educators. They really were intelligent women, and they understood what Martha and Louis--and they weren't just following

Martha, they were looking at the whole thing.

But you also had students that used to drive you up a pole. I had to teach the 8:30 class in the morning which was like a preparatory or practice class for Graham technique. And I taught it in what was normally a dining room, a huge room, and it had a battleship linoleum floor, and in the cold Vermont morning, which would get hot during the day, that was one cold floor.

And I had a student, I remember she was from Milwaukee or Minnesota or someplace, and she taught dance in a YMCA. She was tall and gangly and not marvelously coordinated. And she would be there early--I always told them to come and warm up and so on. She would be there early, and inevitably--there were fifty students in class--I'd have to move them around so I could see them. And I would say, you know, "You do your warm-ups." In disgust one day, when I moved her, she said, "I just don't see why I do the warm-ups. Every time I get my spot warmed, you move me." [laughter] She didn't understand the purpose at all. [laughter]

I had another, a wonderful woman, Marion Strang, who became head of the dance at Barnard College. Beautiful, beautiful woman. And she just loved--because I was a third her age--to send me up every time she could. She would sit in a beautiful second position, and then she'd take the first contraction and cross her eyes [laughter] and look like she was in such agony the rest of the time that I couldn't keep a straight face.

John Martin's Class

Heidi: Well, you must have taught with a certain amount of drama and passion and--

Bonnie: Well, I did--

Heidi: --sincerity, and--

Bonnie: --I did, indeed.

Heidi: --probably a bit serious?

Bonnie: I was very serious indeed. I had to have breakfast every morning with Louis, and John Martin, who was teaching history. All the Graham company were required to go to John's class, which was at 8:30 also--I mean if you weren't teaching--and it was only so many days a week. And we had worked until 11, I had driven Martha until 2:00, I was one cross-eyed kid. If I could move, I could

stay awake, but if you sat me down, I'd just--clonk.

John gave a lecture--he was writing his first book--and what he was doing was reading the chapters of his book, and it was on dance. It's quite a remarkable book because nothing like it had been written before. And it deals with early ritual, et cetera, you know, the whole origins of human ritual in dance. But we had a terrible time staying awake.

So we began doing things like crocheting, knitting, whatever you could do. Or print little names on your clothes, et cetera, et cetera. We ran out, didn't have any more to do. And then we became very aware that there were certain words that kept coming back. We weren't hearing the sentences, just the words. So we developed a game in which everybody got to choose a word. And then you listened hard, and you got a mark when he used that word or he asked it. And so we kept ourselves awake by these ploys. Martha thought we were getting a real education. [laughter]

And people were so sore! It was a crazy place to teach--he taught in this big gymnasium and he sat at the table. John is sandy looking--Mary Jo Shelley {?}, the director, once called him a long strawberry soda. And that was exactly what he looked like. A sort of pale, reddish complexion; hair, mustache, everything. Nice man.

But you could see everybody getting hotter, sleepier, and their bottoms were so sore they couldn't sit on the floor. So they began bringing in blow-up pillows. Inevitably at some point there'd be a pillow that blew up, and you'd get this raspberry. [laughter] It would just kill us. John never dropped a word, he kept right on going.

Bill: Why were people's bottoms sore? From the work you were doing?

Bonnie: Oh, yes. All the muscles you're using. And to sit on a hard vinyl floor! And everybody has to be skinny. So you're sitting not on any cushion.

But the breakfasts, however, were absolutely delightful, and they did keep me awake. John and Louis decided to have a battle royal over who was the greater composer between Gilbert and Sullivan and Strauss. John was for Gilbert and Sullivan and knew all the songs, so they sang songs at each other and argued, and Louis would one-up John with something of Strauss. And so it was really just quite hysterical. They'd sing, carry on. Not every morning, of course, but enough mornings to make it really memorable.

May O'Donnell and Gertrude Schurr

Bill: I was thinking about the company as a family and what it was like for two of those people to get singled out, two of the kids, to become the teachers, Mom and Dad's helpers. Did it change the dynamics in the group?

Bonnie: No, I think that Dorothy and I were so, considered friendly and non-threatening, and I don't know. We didn't seem to have any trouble. We had good friends amongst them. We all hated Gertrude Schurr with a vigor, she was bossy. She lived with May O'Donnell, and May was gorgeous and western. May arrived the second year I was in the Graham company--or maybe even when I was an apprentice, the second year apprenticeship. And her mother came all the way east with her from California.

Her beautiful daughter had never been out, but she had studied with somebody who said, "You must go study with Martha Graham," so May was determined to come. She was older than us, maybe twenty or something. And her mother arrived with May at the studio. As usual I was in the studio, opened the door and welcomed them in, and was delighted to discover somebody from the West Coast. I got in a very chatty sort of state with her mother and with May. Then Martha came along, and they met and her mother allowed me to stay because she thought I was such a nice girl.
[laughter]

Heidi: It was an important chat. Made May O'Donnell's career.

Bonnie: Right. And May was beautiful and a wonderful dancer. She's in her, almost nineties now, and she's still gorgeous. Not dancing, but--.

Anyway. Gertrude was always trying to manipulate Martha in favor of May. And this pained us no end. Because Gertrude wasn't a very good dancer. And she wore thick glasses. And when she took her glasses off she was an absolute mess, she didn't know where she was going, just blind as a bat.

So you'd hear her {who?} start a dance {?} and say, "Gertrude's got her glasses off," and I was in terror because {?} knew we were going to step on her head or something and she'd go nuts. So you kept hissing to each other, "Gertrude's coming."
[laughter] So we had a focus anyway in Gertrude.

Bill: What became of her? Did she stay there?

Bonnie: She hung on to Martha like a leech throughout her life. And actually, there were many good factors in Gertrude. I just thought she was a terribly rigid teacher, I hated her teaching. But she taught many good young artists. But she and May had a school for a long time after they left the Graham company.

Heidi: Did they leave after you did?

Bonnie: A long time after. And May developed a wonderful company, trained. And varied the Graham technique, became O'Donnell sort of work. Was lovely, open, she was a very western, fresh, open person. And Gertrude, of course, adored her. Ultimately May married. During the war she married Ray Green who was a composer, a lovely man. But she kept her friendship. She always loved Gertrude, and she would tell me that Gertrude telephoned every week and she got all the gossip and that sort of thing.

Gertrude then began living with Rachel Yochum {?} and together they wrote a book on Graham technique. Rachel was the head of the Performing Arts High School, a really lovely woman too, fine person. Much brighter than Gertrude, but she depended on Gertrude as a really, you know, pusher of the kids. She was Jewish New York, knew how to drive these kids, whip them into shape, get them out, motivate them. She was very good on all of that.

Geordie Graham and Winthrop Sargeant

Bonnie: Martha's sister, Geordie, whom I'd gone to Neighborhood Playhouse with, was married to Winthrop Sargeant {?}, who was the outstanding critic for The New Yorker and a very fine musician. They lived underneath me at 63 East 11th and I adored Geordie because she had--when Geordie giggled, it didn't matter what it was about, you giggled, it was such a delicious giggle. She'd been in the Denishawn company, a quite charming dancer.

She was a frailer littler--she was such a replica of her mother, like a southern lady, you know. There was a kind of frailish feminine quality, unlike Martha at all. And her life was really spoiled because Martha just so overwhelmed it. But it was most spoiled because she was married to Winthrop Sargeant, who went and developed the most convenient disease for a writer that I ever ran into. He had diverticulosis, spasms of the diverticulae. And his doctor's solution was that he drink beer at dinner and sit afterwards and drink beer--he was terribly skinny--which he loved, you know.

So he kind of held forth during the dinner and all of that sort of stuff. I would come in after rehearsals, and get to their door, and I'd often go in and talk with them. I learned a lot from Winthrop. He was very, very bright, terribly knowledgeable musically. He told me a lovely story of Toscanini--he was first violinist with Toscanini--and they were in Buenos Aires, I think, or Rio de Janeiro and he had some new members of the orchestra to deal with, they were added.

Toscanini was trying like mad to get a kind of quality of lightness and a burst of tone, and he couldn't get it out of this musician. So he marched up in front of him, and he took a silk handkerchief from his pocket and stuffed it into his hand very, very hard and held it in front of the musician and let it go like this. And the thing burst into the air, which is a beautiful image, you know, for the guy to get this tone that he wanted, this lightness.

Winthrop--when I left they were married, but he began philandering a bit and eventually they were divorced. He continued writing for years and wrote very, very well. Crotchety in many ways, kind of a crotchety figure, but he had a great insight into Graham. Martha very much appreciated him, and he did some of the very good writing about her work early on.

So it was quite good relationship in those very early years. But it left Geordie devastated, and she never really recovered from that, and she became alcoholic. She tried acting, and she tried doing different things, but it never came off. She never had the sort of fiber that was necessary. And Martha, I think, kept pulling the rug out from under her by sort of taking care of her.

Martha Graham Treated for Alcoholism

Bonnie: The two of them {Geordie and Winthrop? or Geordie and Martha?} got to be terrible alcoholics. Geordie actually--Martha made her sort of secretary of the school, and people loved her, but she wasn't terribly--she couldn't develop a school, she wasn't efficient or anything like that, but she was sweet.

Heidi: This is while you were there?

Bonnie: No, no, many years later. Finally they had to get her into a place where they could dry her out. Her health was going to pieces. Martha had already been through this awful trauma for herself--for quite a number of years in the late 60's Martha was

alcoholic, was just in a stupor a lot of the time, and the company were just supporting her and were drying her out. They were into ruses, you know, before concerts to get Martha exercising and to--. She could still create, but it was a real fogbound situation. I think they finished one concert season, it could have been about '69 or '68 or something like that--.

I didn't see Martha at this time because I was just so involved in family and not in the company. And the whole thing had changed, it wasn't any family at all, it was a professional company, and you had to go through secretaries and that sort of stuff, and I found that uncomfortable and not necessary. Anyway, somebody found Martha on her floor, and nobody to this day knows how long she had been unconscious, but it had been quite a period of time. And they got her to the hospital. She had kidney failure, and they didn't really expect her to live.

I heard this, and Ernst had given her up as a patient some years before, and my doctor had been her doctor for years, and he literally kept her alive through many periods. Because of her way of working, because of her way of eating, because of her tensions and so on, she didn't menstruate more than once a year, sort of thing, so her whole endocrine system was cockeyed. And she actually had a terrible hernia and didn't have it operated on, was sure that she could handle it--but it began to stick out like a little tower, and she finally did have surgery on that.

Heidi: Did Ernst do that?

Bonnie: I'm not sure, I don't imagine he did. But he would be called in the middle of the night by friends who didn't know what to do when Martha was drunk. And would have to--he was already catching babies all the time, and he would have to go and get Martha and take her home. And she wouldn't listen, and she--he was having a hard time with his own wife who was alcoholic, and he was just horrified with the whole thing. So he just said he wasn't going to treat her any more.

I don't know who she went to. But I said to him, "You must go see her, she's in Doctors' Hospital, because she needs all the support she can get." And he did go and came back, and he said, "She looks like a case from Bangladesh," which at that time was the most serious famine-ridden place. And he wasn't sure she would live, but she did.

She was quite infirm, couldn't walk, and there were two men, one who was the designer for Lila Acheson Wallace--Reader's Digest--had designed all the interiors in her houses and so on,

and his boyfriend had danced with Martha, adored her, and had also been secretary, sort of--he'd never made it into the company. They had a gorgeous house up in Peekskill or someplace near there. French Regency house--can you have a French Regency? Yes, I guess you can--and a swimming pool and so on.

They took her there to recover. The living room was blue velvet walls with white detailing, utterly French, absolutely exquisite taste but transported from some other world. They were extraordinarily generous, and they had little dogs, and Martha adored dogs. And they got her into the pool every day and, you know, they really helped her to get back. She wouldn't talk about dance. All kinds of people came to visit her, and she would talk about Chinese cooking.

I went with Barbara Morgan several times, because Barbara's book was being held up because Martha was to write the introduction. And so Barbara and I went. Martha was utterly charming. The whole time--she sat on the couch in a beautiful sort of gown. She was herself, her theatrical self, and she did her hair in--she could always do her hair up in interesting ways with scarves or turbans or something, so she spent the evening teaching us how to do this, how to look so elegant, and we were two clumsy {finish ?}--

Bill: Did the treatment work?

Bonnie: It didn't work. She finally did go back into New York, but by this time Ron Protas--

Heidi: For a year or just a short--?

Bonnie: It was during most of a year.

Bill: How old was she then?

Bonnie: She died at 97 {?}, two years ago.

Bill: Sixty-nine, would you say about?

Bonnie: She was seventy at least by then. The trauma for her was that she did not believe that she could choreograph unless she moved. The truth was that for many years, as her own technique diminished, she was choreographing off the dancers' bodies. But in her own mind, she was doing all that moving, however small. But this had become obsessively a problem for her: if she couldn't choreograph, she couldn't live.

Ron Protas had come onto the scene by then, and he really took over. She went back and she fired all her board that had stuck together. One after another, she fired the members of the company, brutally--I mean it became front page stuff in the New York Times. She was really awful. Jeannette {who?} who was the chairman of the board, was so dear about it, and she said, "I think Martha really does need a change. [laughter] She's been struggling to keep things going for the company and not doing very well with it," and so on.

[end of tape ?, side A]

[Interview ?: August 20, 1994

[begin tape ?, side B]

[Bonnie and Bill and Heidi. Also present: Shirley Winn]

V DANCE NOTATION

Dance Notation Bureau, Marva Spellman

Bill: This is Saturday, August 20th, 10:30-ish in the morning in Tiburon with Bonnie Bird, Shirley Winn, and Heidi Gundlach.

Bonnie, we were talking just before we hooked the recorder back up about Martha and your contact with her toward the end of her life. You were saying that you talked to her about improving her notation.

Bonnie: I was working at the Dance Notation Bureau at that time as director of educational services, I guess, something title like that that I had. {date?} And I was very eager--as were many people--to see that Martha Graham's dances were actually Laban notated. At that time, the U.S. government, the National Endowment for the Arts, was giving quite a lot of funds to notating works. It's an expensive process, and it can take certain circumstances in which decent notation can be done.

Doris Humphrey was a great supporter of dance notation from the very beginning. And her works were notated way back in the 50's. Those dances are seen today--she's been dead since 1958 or '9 or whenever--her works are seen, are part of the living history in that they are reconstructed and made come to life in some way by dance students and companies all around the world.

Graham's are inaccessible, and so I--and Graham has always been very defensive about her work. Well, that's fine. To have something notated doesn't mean that the author releases this, it's there. They can say, "Nobody is even to look at this score until I've been dead fifty years, or nobody may reconstruct this without my approval, and I have to approve of everything to do with it."

They can say who does the reconstruction, where it's done--they can put any kind of limitation. It simply is that the work is notated, and it's there, preserved, and they are still totally in control of it. And in control through their own estates past their lives. I suppose under U.S. copyright there's

a time when it becomes public, I don't know. Fifty years for music, I don't know what it does for dance.

So I said to the director of notation and Muriel Topaz, {?} who was the real, the chief notator, that I would go and talk to Martha because I didn't think she knew how notation had developed. {what date for this, Bonnie?}

When I was in the company, in about the second year that I was in the company, Marva Spellman, who was a Hanya Holm dancer --. Marva Spellman had gone many summers to study in Europe, and she was a Laban notator, I mean learning it. She studied with Mary Wigman--this was in the 30's while the Wigman school was still quite something going. She came back very excited about the potential of Laban notation. And she was the first person that we knew personally, members of the company, that knew something about notation.

And we were curious, and so we asked Marva to come and teach the company. I think we organized it, I don't think Martha or Louis did. And she came and spent half a day teaching us sort of the basics of Laban notation. It totally turned off most of the dancers, who hate anything that's on paper, and symbols drive them bats. But it was intellectually stimulating to know that it could be done.

The Process of Notation, and a Discussion with Martha

Bonnie: Martha was interested in it--she's very smart and knew the potential value of it--but she didn't want anybody else, she was very scary about it. And many choreographers are. They can't stand to have anybody in the room when they are rehearsing, for example, unless they know that person. And if there's a strange thing sitting in the corner, a notator, who might ask them a question, they just go up a pole. I knew that I had to convince her on a number of levels that things had changed, that, first of all, the notator doesn't ask any questions, the notator sits--they can be at a distance from the choreographer.

There are certain things that are important. If the dance is being constructed and the choreographer can have them there, then they are there every day for every rehearsal. And frequently people like Paul Taylor, who became a great supporter of notation, actually liked--I can't say this was true of Paul, but I know of other people who liked to have the notator there because they forgot what they did the day before. So they pretty soon were very cozy with the notator, who was reminding them that

this was what they did and that's where it was and who did it, et cetera.

They can do rapid notation, which is a sketchy kind of thing, to remind them of what the whole work is. And especially if it's a new work that--artists are changing it all the time, so they don't try to do detailed stuff. They do the detailed stuff at home, or away, mostly, and then come back and check and go home and work. Because it's a slow process.

Now, that's starting with the choreography of a new work. The other time when you can properly notate is when a work is being reconstructed because you're getting the real stuff. It's not as useful when you just go to rehearsals one after another because nobody's talking about the work, nobody's digging in and saying, "The movement initiates here." You've got to find out what the artist really wants, and so the reconstruction process is the one that's closest to it.

Bill: Reconstruction takes place when the original choreographer is no longer around?

Bonnie: No. It could be the artist is reconstructing their work. It could be any member of their company that's reconstructing their work, it could be--.

Heidi: Or a new company member.

Bill: I see.

Bonnie: Or anybody. And they test the score over and over and over again. A score is never released or finalized until it's had a whole series of performance tests, so to speak, too.

So the notating is a long process and fairly expensive one because it's so labor-intensive. But it's speeded up a lot because there are various mechanical means, I don't even know all of them, that can--are helping the notators, but those are minor kinds of things. And there's actually a typewriter ball so you can type the score.

I went to Martha, and she was intrigued. I brought her copies of Doris's stuff--I knew that would stimulate her. [laughter] And I indicated the number of times the things had been reconstructed and what Doris released. She didn't release everything to everybody. And so she was--we had a very pleasant session.

Bill: Had it been a long time since you'd seen her?

Bonnie: I hadn't seen her for quite a while--well, no, I'd actually seen her while she was ill. And she was now back. I'd gone to see her several times when she was ill. This was just a couple of years later.

Ron Protas, and Codifying Graham's Work

Bonnie: And so we had a very pleasant time, and thank heavens Ron Protas was not there. Getting the appointment was quite a job because Ron had to approve it, and I hoped he would leave us alone. He was there at the beginning, and then he left.

Bill: What was his relationship?

Bonnie: He is the manager of her company. He's the person who actually, when she was ill, moved in and became her dog's body. And gradually has absorbed the whole thing unto actually choreographing. Does anybody believe that? I mean he really has artistic say-so. I mean he was finally dragging that out of Martha himself and designing costumes here and there, and things like this, And he's a nerd. And he's not a nice man, either.

He had an absolute fixation, and I knew this, on garnering everything that had ever been said about Martha, ever printed about Martha, ever written, any interview, anything--and making it a possession. And he would elaborate this in terms of "the good of dance" and "setting up a Graham institute," et cetera, et cetera. And there were aspects of his gathering this sort of stuff that were very useful because nobody was doing it, and he had the source, too. So if Martha wrote and asked for something in her name, she'd probably get it, you know, whatever it was.

But Martha said to me at the end of our talk--and I was assuring her it would be no cost to her at all, to the foundation or to her, that we would apply for NEA, that they would have complete copyright control, complete control over the stuff. She would have a copy, and there would be a locked copy at the Dance Notation Bureau. And there were all kinds of protections legally, et cetera.

Martha said, "I'll talk to Ron, but I must talk to Ron." And then it was zilch, nothing. Ron Protas absolutely forbade anything at all. And so we couldn't pursue it at all, and nothing has ever happened, her work is not notated. I think people have notated work from film, they've done it from all

kinds of things, so there are tacky things. But film is terrible to notate from because you don't know what the person behind the person is doing, and it's all very inaccurate. We'll have rough information, but the film itself is better than the notation, in that case.

Bill: What was his motivation for being so difficult?

Bonnie: Well, I suppose in his head, he was protecting Martha. But he was, it was clear--I mean she was in her 80's by then--it was clear that he was going to be the executor of her total life, Graham life, after she died. And continue to run the company, which he does, amazingly enough. And to make all decisions artistically. And he continues to do that today.

He tried, in addition, at one time--and I think he will attempt it again, I'm not sure--to license every Graham teacher. And this, of course, was like, you know, patenting the relativity theory. He actually has walked into classes--I know of one class that Clover Roupp {?} who was a Graham dancer, was teaching in London studios {is this a proper name of a place?} in England. The Graham company was in town and Ron walked in at the beginning of her class to demand, how dare she be teaching Graham work? She had no license, she wasn't qualified, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

It happened that a girl, a wonderful woman whose name I can't remember now, English, who was in Paul Taylor's company and does a lot of his reconstructions, was going to take the class and she stood up to him. Clover absolutely wilted. She didn't have any licensing or anything, there never was any. And it was Clover Roupp teaching Graham-based work.

Well, this atmosphere was so bad from the early 70's on that people were scared to actually teach. They stopped calling what they did "Graham work." They were teaching Graham work and pretending it was something else. Or if they were fairly strong, they'd say "Graham-based work" to avoid--because he was going to sue everybody. And so he had created a kind of atmosphere of fear.

I told you earlier that I did this Early Years Conference {what was this?}, and that's when I used the film. And I said, "I'm going to teach a Graham technique class," not Graham-based, but Graham class. And it would be based on this film which was my evidence of what I was doing, and my anecdotal memory around how she taught, what her objectives were and so on that doesn't appear on the film, all of the quality aspects of the thing.

I went to Marion [North] before I did it, because I had learned that Gertrude Schurr, who was very close to Martha and for years an official Graham teacher, even outside the Graham school--she was at the High School of Performing Arts and was an official Graham teacher and she was so close to Martha because she sort of kept watch over Martha's sister, they had retired to Tucson--even she refused to teach a class because she was scared of Ron, even though she was that close to Martha.

Martha was scared of Ron. She couldn't get around him, she couldn't say, "Ron, get out of the way." She was so beholden. Because she couldn't dress herself in the morning, she couldn't write. She had such arthritis that her fingers went off at the right angle from the joints. So she wore black gloves and these cloths. She could hold a pen and write her name and amazingly enough, it looked like her original--I don't know how people continue to write with deformed hands and still make their mark exactly the same, rough, but the same. And she had a nurse, she had a housekeeper. He was keeping her alive, and none of us could, you know, fault him for that. But he called the tune.

And so I went to Marion and said, "What would the Center do if I were sued by Ron Protas for doing this class?" Marion said, "Let him sue." She thought it was a great cause celebre, so she wasn't afraid of it. Needless to say, he didn't sue.

Things are still on the broil in respect to that. I think he's still trying to license. He brought in Stuart Hoads {?} who was a long-time member of the company, very decent guy, too, whose wife was the head of the school at the time, or head of the technique training, former wife, and they tried to codify the Graham work completely.

And they have in a way rather succeeded in codifying it. If you go to the Graham school now, and you're a member of the apprentice company or the company, and you are a good teacher, they really train you as a teacher, and it is highly codified. And in a sense they are licensing teachers, that is, they approve of certain teachers.

The Laban Center now has a relationship with Diane Gray, who is the head of the school and rehearsal director of the company--and we try to get our teachers from there because it's very hard to find a good Graham teacher. But we try to find people that are human too.

Bill: It helps.

Bonnie: Yes, it helps. And we have a very good person at the Laban Center who was a key teacher. That's the one that this film that I--I don't think I've even talked to you about--that we've been making of me and Thea Barrons {?} because we were--she was in the last company with Graham, and I was in the first major companies.

Merce Cunningham and Dance Notation

Bonnie: I could say something here about Merce. Merce went through a funny thing at the same time. Merce is very chary, he doesn't like Laban notation at all, he doesn't like any kind of recording except what he does. And it happened, amusingly enough, that John [Cage] and Merce and I decided to learn Laban notation. This must have been the first year that I was back in New York after I left Smith, 1950, I guess, and we decided to teach ourselves Laban notation.

Merce and John and I would meet. We only did it probably for four or five times. And they had a manual and a book had just come out, and you could teach yourself from the very beginning, it's extremely simple, and so we were teaching ourselves. John, who is so bright and so fast, decided he'd notate "Totem Ancestor," John's first--Merce's first solo. And so he did a rough notation, rough because he wasn't very advanced and he didn't know all the symbols for subtler things and so on.

He did a sketch of "Totem Ancestor" and somehow or other that sketch got to the Dance Notation Bureau. John probably gave it to them, or gave it to somebody who, in turn, gave it to the Bureau. And while I was at the Bureau we had to move from 12th Street to Union Square. So files that hadn't been looked at for years had to be opened up and sorted out and recatalogued and so on and we found this original of "Totem Ancestor."

Well, Herb Kummel {?} made a terrible mistake, in the sense that they list all the things that the Bureau possesses in the way of scores, and they indicate also that the score is available, and this isn't available, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. It's just a statement of what is in, has been notated, in a sense.

Merce got a copy of that and he saw "Totem Ancestor" there, and he went purple and he absolutely cut any potential relationship with the Dance Notation Bureau right then and there, and angrily, too. I don't know exactly what took place, but I was stunned and I decided that this is not one of the battles I

was going to take up, I wasn't going to be a bridge to do anything about that.

Bill: You were at the bureau at the time?

Bonnie: I was at the bureau at the time when this happened, yes. I've never brought it up with Merce or anything else. I don't think Merce is opposed to dance notation, he just doesn't want it to do with him at all. And he is, in his own funny way, possessive of his work. But that's normal for any artist, to try and have some control over the work because they get exploited so badly. And there's such a dearth of library of dance itself.

You know, it's so fascinating to think that when you hand somebody a score, you say, "Here's a piece of music." Does anybody ever say, "Here's a dance?" We don't have a library of dance. We have such a tiny library of actual scores, so to speak.

I can remember introducing Clive Barnes, believe it or not-- it was when I was president of the American Dance Guild and for some reason or other we were going to run something on Laban notation. Clive Barnes had just come to be the critic of the New York Times, from England, and he was essentially a ballet critic because that's all he ever saw in England, and he was quite a lively guy.

I had a meeting with him and one other Guild person who knew notation very well. We introduced him to Laban notation, and he was fascinated. One funny remark he made, he said, "Good God, if I had this score to study like my colleagues in music, I wouldn't have had to go to so damn many 'Swan Lakes.'" Because he--to really know a ballet they have to almost memorize the entrances, who did it, how they did it, and so on to have anything to write about comparatively.

Dance Notation Systems Other Than Laban

Shirley: I have to mention that the Laban, remember, used the Feuillet {?} system which was going on in Europe for about seventy years, starting in about 1899, and Laban used that as his inspiration and then gradually levels of interpretation were put on and hands and, you know, wonderful things added. But that was also in the Feuillet notation, arm notations, and head and face in some of them.

Bonnie: The interesting thing is, of course--the idea that dance notation is new is crazy, man has been trying to write down dance since

the beginning of time, I mean before they had language practically they were drawing little characters and things, trying to catch this thing called dance.

Shirley: It was also sacred then, too, which has implications still.

Bonnie: Absolutely. And you'll find that there were notations way back, and they'd last a certain period of time with a certain group. By the time Shirley began to do the research that she did Feuilliet was an extraordinarily sophisticated notation system. And there is a system in Russia, Stepanov's work, that most of the ballet dancers learned there. Very useful. There are half a dozen Laban notation systems for dance.

Bill: Still being used?

Bonnie: Still being used. But many of them are specific to a style. Like Bennesh {} works best for ballet, but as soon as they shift from ballet they have to have a whole bunch of new symbols. Laban's thing was to be able to notate human movement. So you can use Laban notation for synchronized swimming, or a four-legged study of animals, or anything.

Shirley: Didn't he even do a bark? There was a bark notation I think I remember seeing, dog's bark. [laughter]

Bonnie: Really? That was what was remarkable about Laban, that he started with the human being, not a style, you know, not just a tool for a style.

Shirley: It was very abstracted.

Bonnie: So that's why it's internationally recognized and used, it's the strongest of them. That's not to say the other systems--. For example, Bennesh works wonderfully for ballet and in a funny way--one of my good friends, Debbie Chapman, is a superb Bennesh notator, and boy, is she one of the best rehearsal directors! The Bennesh notator who also is a good rehearsal director is a real prize for a company. She knows the work, and she can rehearse the company.

[end tape ?, side B]

[begin tape ?, side A]

VI MARRIAGE TO RALPH GUNDLACH, 1938

A Brief Review, and on to Teaching at Cornish

- Bill: We're going to do a chronology now. We know you were born in 1914.
- Bonnie: Right. On April 30th. I'm a Taurus, and I've never understood what that is, really.
- Bill: It's a lot of bull.
- Bonnie: A bull in a china shop.
- Heidi: Born where?
- Bonnie: Portland, Oregon.
- Heidi: Did you live there long?
- Bonnie: I lived there for, I believe, two years. And what puzzles me is that I don't know where my brother was born, in Portland or Seattle. He's two years younger. I'll have to ask him. I don't think I ever really knew. Well, I think I told you that my father was in the automobile business, and we moved to Seattle in 1916. I went to elementary school at the Madrona School in the Madrona district in Seattle, I went first grade through eighth grade there.
- We lived on Howell Street in a little cottage, a bungalow sort of a house. We had lived before that, before I went to school, on Capitol Hill for a very short time, I think. And I only vaguely remembered the house when mother pointed it out to me one time. And then we lived in the University District, and that's when I lived next door to Caid Leslie, who influenced me to become a dancer.
- Bill: Bonnie, were you already going to Cornish at that time?
- Bonnie: I didn't go to Cornish until we moved to the Madrona District. I went to Caird first in his own studio. And I think I was about seven when I started that.
- Bill: Oh, then he went to Cornish, and you went with him.

Bonnie: Yes.

Bill: And you were about twelve when you moved out to Bothell?

Bonnie: Yes, and I continued to come into the city. I went to high school at the Roosevelt High School, which was in the northern end of the city. And Bothell is just north of Seattle, so my father would drive me in and drop me off at the school.

Bill: And where was his place of business, then?

Bonnie: Not very far away. It was on Roosevelt Avenue. And every afternoon at 2:00, I would take a street car to the Cornish School. Occasionally, I would not--in the earlier years--I would go home by bus to Bothell. I'd take a, just a regular bus to Bothell and go home after school. But that didn't happen too often.

Bill: Martha Graham to Cornish when you were fifteen?

Bonnie: It was 1929, yes, I was fifteen. She was brought to the Cornish School and then I really focused on being a professional dancer, whatever that meant, because she asked me to join the company, but I had to finish school. My junior and senior year I had to jam into one year and a summer school.

I went to New York in the fall of '31 and started in at the Neighborhood Playhouse and I was an apprentice in the Graham company. We didn't have that term, by the way. She didn't have a term like apprentice at all, I'm using it just to distinguish me from the company. I stayed with her through the spring of 1937. And then I went to head the dance department at the Cornish School.

This is just big hunks because there were a lot of things in between. I was at the Cornish School for three years. I just recently looked at some correspondence with Miss Cornish, and I had forgotten the battle I carried on with the Cornish School for three years, which is reflected in my letters from Miss Cornish who had resigned because she was so mad at the board.

I continued to be mad at the board, and she totally supported me. I don't know what I wrote to her exactly, but from her letters, it's very clear. And then there are some actual letters that I saw the other day in which I outlined what they didn't do, and they promised to do. They didn't publicize or support me in any way. The board had changed--and this made Miss Cornish leave--from being people who supported the arts to being

businessmen who wanted to make it pay, and she couldn't stand that.

She stayed the first year I was there because she used to say to me, "I stayed because of you, because I couldn't leave you to these wolves" kind of thing. I'm quite astonished at the letters I wrote, they are very mature in dealing with this kind of issue with the board. I looked at them, I couldn't believe I had made them up, very strong, very straight, very businesslike. I didn't know I had that capacity.

My years at Cornish were wonderful. I really enjoyed them and made a lot of out of them. And then I had established in my last year at Cornish what I called the American Dance Theater. And this I intended to be a contemporary dance company, but not closed to involving the other arts. It was interesting to me to read what I wrote at that time, because I couldn't quite remember why I didn't go to Mexico with Ralph.
[tape interruption]

The Wedding

Bill: Had you been talking about getting married before and just trying to decide when?

Bonnie: Ralph could never bring himself to say, "Would you marry me?" it was like chasing. He was so funny. When I first met Ralph he was terribly--he didn't want to be romantic, and he didn't want to be seen to be sentimental or anything like this, so he never used adjectives. [laughter]. They weren't in his vocabulary, he couldn't say anything that wasn't sort of almost professorial, you know.

Bill: Being very scientific?

Bonnie: Very scientific. He wasn't stiff at all, but when it came to anything sort of close to the emotions, he'd get frozen a bit.

Well, Ralph had also been through a very bad marriage. He'd been dumped by his wife [Alice], who ran off with a physicist who was the--every female, wife, on the campus was after the same guy. And Ralph had been a very good friend of this man, Roy Kennedy, and his wife, who was a really nice woman. I later met her, just lovely. And so she was in a pretty agonized state because this whole thing was--. And it was suggested by Alice and Roy, Ralph's first wife, that they just trade, you know, why didn't Ralph hook up with Frances? That would make it all easy.

So Ralph had had almost four years of having to raise his daughter Joan, because I think Alice left when Joan was four. And he had M.A. graduate students living at the house--I told you about that. And finally he realized it wasn't good enough for Joan and he had asked his mother to come over, and his mother had come from Wallace, Idaho, absolutely delighted to get out of Wallace because it was a very small town, and she was a singer and had been trained as an opera singer.

She had tried--Wallace was an interesting town in that an awful lot of the people relating to the mines were engineers and people with education, and their wives were desperate for some kinds of cultural activities. So they had formed singing groups, did study clubs and so on. Anyway, she adored being in Seattle. But there was a very lovely graduate student that had her eye on Ralph, and Ralph, no doubt--he was a flirt--had flirted with her and had dated her too. She had glommed onto Ralph's mother and to Joan, and she would cook with his mother.

Ralph felt he was being invaded, you know, that this was the thing of the pathway to the man's heart kind of was through the stomach. And so he didn't bring me around at all. And I did not bring him around to my family because mother's engulfing techniques had already been manifest too many times. So Ralph and I decided we would get married, and we figured out a day, a Thursday if I remember, the only day when we both had early class and then we had a break long enough to go and get married.

We didn't think ahead very well because we didn't know where to go, and we headed north and got as far as Everett when he realized that if we went any further we wouldn't get back for our class. So we went into the courthouse and Ralph ran into one of those little characters that you find in political parties who are totally ineffective but they are all over the place, you know, they are sort of, I don't know, weird. [laughter] Tammany Hall is full of them, but I had never seen them in Everett.

This man came up to Ralph because he, Ralph, was often active in Democratic--in the politics in the local community that we lived in, or were going to live in. And so he greeted him. And then we learned we had to have two witnesses, so Ralph asked him if he would be a witness.

And the judge that said he would marry us, but he couldn't marry us in the official chambers, he'd marry us in his office. And he had a washstand in his office, so we got married in front of the washstand. And the other man he got in was some clerk or other who, some problem with his eyelids. And he kept looking at

us. [laughter] It was absolutely weird. So that was our short marriage and we dashed back to teach our class.

That night we were going to the 10th anniversary of the Seattle Repertory Playhouse, they were having a big affair and everybody was to come dressed up.

Well, I had a student at Cornish earlier in the year. She was actually a dress design major because they had fashion design as one of the courses. And she had asked if she could design my entire wardrobe, and she would make my clothes for me. And so we'd gone to the cheapest place in town to get fabric and she had made me, amongst many other things, an absolutely lovely organdy evening dress, sort of full-skirted, it had various layers of color, brown and pale apricot and pale yellow or something, beige, I don't remember exactly--and so I was going to wear this.

And Ralph had borrowed from George McKay, his handball partner--also a composer and a very good friend of ours--his tux, because Ralph didn't have a tux. But George had shorter arms than Ralph. So Ralph's tux was about to here, with his cuffs hanging out. We were getting dressed to go to the theater when a Seattle Times reporter appeared at the door, and he had heard that we were married. We hadn't told a soul. But this character, this little politician who was our witness, had decided this was a scoop. And so he had reported it to somebody, and the Times picked it up, and they sent a reporter up.

Ralph was so incensed! He said, "This is a private matter and I don't wish to be interviewed, and I don't hold the newspaper in very high repute because of what they did recently and so on." And he really told them. And the poor old reporter was getting more and more frustrated because he was trying to ask Ralph questions like, "When did you meet her?" He said, "I can't remember." Ralph was giving him all the evasive things.

And finally the guy got nervous enough that he decided to light a cigarette and he didn't have a match, and asked Ralph for a match. Ralph said, "Yes, I'll get you a match," and he got him a match and made him pay a penny for it. And it was a Spanish refugee appeal, or medical bureau match!

The guy finally said, "Well, if you don't let me interview, I'm going to report this conversation as we've stated it." And Ralph said fine, and that conversation does appear in the newspaper.

Heidi: Wasn't it like a headline or something?

Bonnie: There was--"Psych Professor Elopes with Dancer."

Heidi: Which makes it sound like he's sort of some weird psychic guy and you're a belly-dancer.

Bonnie: It really was crazy. We went out the back stairs to avoid bumping into them and to get in our car. And as we came around the corner, the cameraman jumps out and takes a picture of us--me holding my skirt up, Ralph with letters to mail in his arms, hanging out of his tuxedo. A really awful picture!

Bill: Do you have that around someplace?

Bonnie: I do.

Bonnie: And so we went to the theater, somewhat discombobulated, but thought nothing more. I didn't think it would ever go in the newspaper or anything, it didn't occur to me, and I went in at 8:30 to teach my class. Merce and Ralph Gilbert, my accompanist, and everybody was there. And I had the studio immediately next to Nelly Cornish's apartment--she had a top floor apartment.

I started class, and the door blew open. She had a big double door because she used the studio as a sort of foyer for her parties when she needed it. She came in shaking the newspaper and saying, "How dare you get married without discussing that with me?" And so on. She carried on quite a bit. I was appalled. I didn't think I had to tell Aunt Nellie everything.

And the kids just broke up. There was no class the rest of the day, we all went swimming, we decided to have a picnic instead. So that was my marriage. And that's about where we better stop.

[end tape 2, side A, no side B]

INSERT

Heidi: Wait. When did you get married, by the way?

Bonnie: On May 19th, 1938, as an afterthought, in the sense that we--we had run a big affair to raise money for the Spanish refugee appeal, and hadn't raised a lot of money and had raised a lot of hackles. And so we thought, "Well, what the hell? We might as well get married," and we got married shortly after that.

We got married by trying to find in our schedules, between the two of us, two hours when we could find a justice of the peace to hook us together. I had already moved into the house, and my parents were slightly goggly-eyed about it, and so were a lot of other people. And we didn't want to upset Joan, who was going to school, you know. And it was still a little touchy in those days.

So we found a time on a Thursday, if I remember correctly. I finished teaching at 10:30, and he did too. And so we drove to Everett, Washington, to get married. I don't think we knew where we were going, but he knew there was a courthouse in Everett. [laughter] And that was about thirty miles or so. And we had to get back to teach in the afternoon, late afternoon.

So we went into the courthouse. And my charming husband had not investigated anything. He hadn't thought about a ring, so we didn't have a ring. I hadn't thought about a ring but I had never been married. He'd been married, so.

Bill: He should have known better.

Bonnie: He should have known better.

We went into the courthouse, and he was immediately assailed by some little character who was a member of the Democratic Club in Seattle who looked like a gangster. And we discovered we had to have witnesses, so we asked this guy to be our witness [laughter].

We found a judge who was free who would marry us. But he couldn't marry us in the court chambers, so he married us in his office, which had a sort of a bathroom, you know, with a hand basin and so on. We were practically married in the bathroom of the judge, it was a weird-looking thing. And Ralph discovered to his horror that this judge's daughter had been a student of his. He was horrified because--and we weren't announcing this whole thing at all, we were just going to get married, and the reason we were not announcing it was our friends were all so poor. What we didn't need was a wedding with everybody getting in a cafuffle about presents and that whole business. And we hadn't any time.

So then we had to find another witness, there had to be two witnesses, and somebody found a clerk. And I was fascinated, I think the guy must have had some kind of a disease, but I had considered him awning-eyed because he had heavy lids, you know, he looked out under these lids, they looked just like awnings, these things coming down. [laughter] So these two weird-looking

characters stood for us as witnesses, [laughter] and the judge married us and charged two dollars. And Ralph was annoyed, it should have been free. [laughter].

Aggressive Newspaper Coverage

Bonnie: Anyway, we went off, we went back to teach, and that night we had to go to the tenth anniversary of the Seattle Repertory Playhouse, headed by Burton and Florence James. (Ralph had been a sort of advisor to them on some research having to do with education and drama and so on in the state of Washington--that I'll get into at a later time.) So Ralph had borrowed a tuxedo for this evening. It was a formal evening at the Playhouse, which was a very nice, small theater in the University District and Seattle's only repertory theater. And a real repertory theater. Real poor, too.

And I, at that point, one of the gals, the designers, at the Cornish School had said, "Can I design all your clothes for you?" She was going to make me grand outfits, you know. She was not a costume designer but a fashion designer. So she would come around with designs for this and that, and we'd go look in cheap places for fabric. And she had made me a wonderful sort of evening dress out of layers of pale brown organdy and pale yellow and so on. It was a kind of full skirt and very pretty thing, which I probably only wore once or twice in my life.

Well, Ralph and I were getting dressed to go to the theater when there was a knock on the door. When Ralph went to the door--and by the way, I have to laugh, because he borrowed his tuxedo from George McKay, who was a composer whom I had worked with, and a very close friend of Ralph's--they played handball together. George had the only tuxedo we knew in town, and so Ralph borrowed it from him, but Ralph's arms were longer, so the sleeves hung out a bit.

He went to the door, and here was a reporter from the Post Intelligencer with a photographer. This crummy little Democrat had notified the newspaper that he had some juicy stuff. He probably got paid five bucks or something. And so this guy stood at the door and said he wanted to interview us. He heard we'd gotten married, he'd seen the certificate or whatever. Anyway. And someplace I have the document of what got published.

Ralph was not about to be interviewed. He said, "This is a private matter, and I don't wish to be interviewed." Well, the

argument went on at the door. I was dressing and vaguely hearing this thing.

Heidi: Well Ralph was pissed off because they hadn't carried any of the advertisements he had submitted for the aid to the Spanish--?

Bonnie: We had just finished this sort of disaster--oh, it was an artistic success--of running a huge fundraiser at the Moore Theater in Seattle to raise money for Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy. I'll have to look, I do have the record of that. And we had really worked hard. I had created a new work for it and I'd gotten the university chorus to come--I think Ralph got them because he used to sing in the chorus.

And I got the Repertory Playhouse to do a wonderful one-act play. God, I don't know, there were all kinds of things went on. And the unions were just nasty. We had to pay five musicians to do nothing because it was a union house. Celia Schultz, who owned the Moore Theater and ran it, gave us free rent, but she couldn't control the unions. And then the stagehands union demanded that they had to have five or six people on stage. So the money that we did make was just disappearing.

In addition to which, the local newspapers were horrible. I was trying to publicize it, and I was running around to the newspapers and placing ads but also trying to talk to anybody who would write a little story. I got a call from the Catholic newspaper and the editor wished to talk with me because we'd sent out publicity about it and he had checked out that my mother was a Catholic, that I was raised a Catholic.

He called me in, and when he saw me, because I looked like seventeen still, he decided I was a dupe of the Soviet Union, and that I had gotten money from Moscow for this. And he really went over me like a harrow, you know, scratching away, angry and so on, and accusing me of being a downright Red. I was offended by this whole thing. It was really horrible. And this is even pre-McCarthy. I mean pre--the DAIS {?} committee was already in existence.

So I got out of that situation and didn't expect anything in the newspaper, and I don't even know if they did ever do any kind of a story. They probably did some snide remark. But the other newspapers, nastily enough--we had evidence to show they had published the wrong date so we didn't have as huge an audience as we might have had, and so on. Ralph was very angry with the newspapers.

And this was the Post Intelligencer, which actually, only two years before, had had a long, important strike and Ralph had been one of the people that had helped the journalists and so on. Everybody went down and marched and so on. It was a Hearst paper. So he wasn't going to give them an interview at all. They were asking questions, "When did you first meet your wife?" He'd say, "I can't remember." And so the conversation comes out as very dumb in a lot of ways. He was just simply not going to give them any facts.

Finally the guy was getting a little nervous. And so he had a cigarette and he didn't have a match, and he asked Ralph for a light. And Ralph went in very nicely and got a bunch of matches which we'd had printed for the Spanish refugees, and he sold it to him for a penny. [laughter] Anyway, this went on, and the guy disappeared finally.

So Ralph and I decided we'd go out the back door and down a flight of stairs and around the corner into our garage to get the car. And as we came down the stairs, me holding my skirt up to have it not in a great bunch, he holding letters he had to mail in his arms sticking out of his tuxedo--

Bill: Flash!

Bonnie: --the photographer jumps out and takes a picture. And the next morning the headline reads something like "Psyche Professor"--and psych spelled with an 'e'--"Elopes with Dancer." [laughter] And then this report with his conversations, like the guy said he would do.

I started to teach class at 8:30, and the doors blew open. Miss Cornish's apartment was immediately adjacent to the studio I was teaching in, and Miss Cornish came in like a tornado. And she said, "How dare you to get married without telling me!" and started a whole ruckus. And of course, Merce and all the kids that were in the class, they were in a state of shock. So we just cancelled the class and went on a picnic. That was it.

Students at Cornish, and at Mills, 1938

Bonnie: That year that I married Ralph, I had already given concerts with students in a kind of student company at Cornish, and we had performed for women's clubs and different groups in the area. I was really very delighted with the groups of students I had. It wasn't a huge group, but I had a number of men, including Merce, and some quite good young dancers. One of them was a young man

who was an actor, and he was the son of Edward Weston, the photographer, Cole Weston. Cole was a student there for a number of years. And Syvilla Fort, the black dancer who later became a very important figure in New York, became a member of Katherine Dunham's company and director of the school and so on.

Bill: Bonnie, were they all high school age at that time, or were they out of school?

Bonnie: No, they were mostly college age. That year, particularly, they were all Cornish students, so that means they were post high school. I didn't teach any younger classes, I taught only the--well, that's not entirely true. I did have one class, I think, that teenagers, young people, could come to.

At the end of that summer, 1938, I went to teach for a short while at Mills College. Ralph was committed to teach at the university.

Bill: At Berkeley?

Bonnie: No, in Washington. And I'd already committed myself to teach at Mills College. It was about a two- or three-week course, I think. And that's the summer that we made this film. I had an MA student.

Heidi: The film?

Bonnie: The little short film of technique for the student from Moscow, Idaho who was doing her MA. I loved working at Mills that summer. It was great fun. The campus was very beautiful.

I don't know, something about being on a campus and having a studio, I remember that it had the most unusual floor. I'd never danced on a floor like this. Usually we were on something called battleship linoleum, which was just great rolls of a heavy-duty linoleum put down over a kind of pad on concrete very often. That's what Martha's studio was in New York until later she got a wooden floor. But this was green, it was kind of like the top of a desk, and was quite beautiful in this old wooden studio. And there was something delightful and airy about the whole thing.

Edward Lindeman

Bonnie: Also, it wasn't a very pressured summer so I went to UC every day and took a class with Edward Lindeman, who was a philosopher from the Columbia University School of Social Work. He had been a

person who I had known--to go back into the Graham years, he had a great respect for Graham and for American artists. He was one of the rare people that recognized what was happening in American culture. He taught a course in American culture [at Columbia] and in the process he took his students to the artists' studios, to Graham's studio as well.

I learned that he was actually chairman of the C.F. Whitney Foundation, which was a foundation started by the C.F. Whitney family, and Dorothy Elmhurst, who founded Dartington later, and her daughter, Beatrice Straight, all were part of that family. And so that foundation played quite a role, not in huge ways, but important ways in supporting the arts. He [Lineman] had a very broad kind of perspective because he was looking at American culture as a philosopher, really.

And this was a very important experience for me to hear somebody talk in this way. It sort of gave me--pulled me out of this personal life that I'd been leading, happily and somewhat blindly, into seeing dance in a much, much bigger context, which I was aware of, but it was filling out in a much more orderly way a lot of ideas about what was happening.

Bill: Sounds like it was helping you kind of spell out, lay out things more conceptually.

Bonnie: I think that's exactly right. And he had a daughter about my age, and she and I were good friends. She was a Bennington student and came to the studio to study. And she and I became very good friends, so I had an opportunity to actually be invited to their house. He had four daughters.

And he knew all the artists in New Jersey, Ben Shahn and all kinds of artists in that area, of which there are many. And it was fascinating to have lunch on a Sunday in their house with the four daughters there. And he, he never missed an opportunity for a meal to be a kind of interesting, stimulating conversation. He might toss out a topic or anything, and I was absolutely dazzled. I'd never been in that kind of intellectual milieu.

He was very close to the man who founded the New School for Social Research--I've forgotten his name--and had a penthouse on top of the New School. The New School was considered at that time the foreign university because it supported and employed so many of the brilliant Jewish scholars escaping from Europe.

[End of tape]

[Interview ? : August 21, 1994]
 [begin tape ?, side B]

Bonnie: I had, with Graham, been in many lecture demonstrations in the New School and so on so I was familiar, because I just lived a block away, with the New School. But in a funny way I had no idea how big schools ever got started. So it was a kind of interesting experience for me to have been a participant in lecture demonstrations which were quite significant at that time.

They were new, a whole new idea. These were a series sponsored by John Martin. And to be in a place which was so not academic in the usual sense because it wasn't--it was much more of an adult education center. Gradually, it's increased and it offers degrees, et cetera, now. But the stimulus was really tremendous. You could just practically feel the energy when you walked in the place in every area, absolutely every area.

Bill: This was in the Graham years that you were doing this?

Bonnie: The 30's, yes.

Bill: So you had known Lindeman by the time he came to Berkeley to teach that summer when you were at Mills?

Bonnie: Yes, absolutely. I had known him, I'd sat in on some of his classes. He'd brought his students to the center--to Graham's studio.

And then one summer he brought the whole of the board of the C.F. Whitney Foundation to Bennington. They were there to consider whether they would support Bennington financially, the Bennington summer school. The board was made up of extraordinary people whose names I do not remember. He acted as the interpreter, so to speak, the questioner and so on.

The board sat in a sort of row. All the students were allowed to listen to this. And Martha Graham and Charles--this was the second summer, I guess--and Doris Humphrey, John Martin, Louis Horst, I mean everybody that was anybody was in this big semi-circle.

Edward started out asking questions about this phenomena that was occurring in the United States. He used a big blackboard, like a big classroom situation. He would say, "Well now, do you mean this," you know, some evocative kind of thing would be said which left you slightly puzzled but also stimulated.

But he would bring it down to something quite practical, quite clear. And it was such an exciting evening, that evening was phenomenal for me. It was really--it hit me, I think, just at the right time. Because I was asking so many questions, and I didn't even know how to ask questions in myself.

I was fascinated by his skill and because I got to know him through Betty, his daughter, he then was very warm and invited me to sit in on classes and so on. And later, before I actually taught at Mills, I was in Los Angeles teaching and had been absolutely rejected by the Los Angeles community.

Lester Horton refused to allow any of his students to come study with me. I was being presented by a woman called Norma Gould in her strange studio. So I didn't have very many students. And I was blackballed by Lester, who didn't want any competition with a Graham person.

Well, Edward was teaching at UCLA, this American culture class. So I thought well, I'll go sit in on it. And then he asked me to do a lecture demonstration on Graham work.

And that was really very exciting because the students were all graduate students, they were all bright. And the only trouble was it was about 90 degrees in the gymnasium and I was talking and demonstrating by the hour, I was not only drained--

Bill: --but prostrate?

Bonnie: I was ready to faint. And we became very, very good friends, and he was a kind of mentor for a number of years for me. He was a very charismatic man. He became the actual--the same time that Hallie Flanagan Davis was head of the theater for the WPA, he was head of recreation for the United States. And so he would come spinning around the United States and came to Seattle and Portland and so on and met Ralph. And we would see him. And again later when we were in New York. He died--oh gosh, he must have died in 1952 or something.

Ralph's House in Seattle, and Daughter Joan

Bonnie: So that very first year of my marriage was already full of people that were beginning to cross from the East to the West, you know. They came into Seattle, there was very often contact with them.

Ralph had a house he'd built as a kind of an experiment, a necessary experiment. Ted Jacobs, who was an architect at the

University of Washington, got very, very interested in low-cost housing and how it was being done in various places in the world and he especially, I think, studied and went to Scandinavia and got some very interesting ideas about, not only design, but how jointly, by doing more than one house at a time, even a small group of people could save a whale of a lot of money by having the same architectural style. So that you then could order custom windows and custom doors, and you could have a house that was not just, you know, what you buy on the shop floor sort of thing.

He and Ralph and a high school teacher jointly bought--this was some years before I had met Ralph--jointly bought six lots in the middle of Seattle. They were tax lots. They got them for \$50 each lot, something crazy like that. And they were on a dead-end street that the city never intended to build clear through. Had they done so, it would have wiped out these particular lots. But it was in sort of an impossible way not needed, and there was another street nearby that could be used. So we had a wonderful woods behind us.

Ralph's house was built around a tree, a beautiful big maple tree. And the next house--Ralph's house was here [indicating] and the next house was here, and another one was over here. And they didn't have enormous lawn areas because it was all sort of on the hillside. They kind of created it so each person's place rolled into the next person. They didn't create fences or anything like that. There was a commonality of style to the houses, and they looked very good together.

By doing the contracting himself--they all worked on each other's houses a lot, friends came in and so on--Ralph built that, and Ted and the other man, and I think they paid \$2,500. A seven-room house--it was quite extraordinary, with lovely French doors and a marvelous kind of sense of being outdoors and indoors at the same time. It was a really simple, but very advanced-thinking house.

They did built-in cupboards, everything was built in so you didn't have to have a lot of furniture. And then they found somebody who built the beds, very simple wooden-framed, but you could roll them around and stuff.

Bill: Where is it in Seattle?

Bonnie: It's on what used to be called 33rd North. I think it's called 33rd Northeast or something now. And there have been houses built in a sort of marshy area that was below.

Joan, who was my new stepdaughter then, just walked to school at the Bush School which was practically across the street.

Heidi: How old was she when you married?

Bonnie: She was eight.

Heidi: And she was born in what year?

Bonnie: In 1929. She had just become eight. She was a darling little girl, really darling girl. And we got along very, very well. We were very close, and she thought it was great because she had a big sister more than a mother.

She'd been batted around an awful lot. Ralph had--actually, she had been given in custody, at the divorce, to the mother. But the mother was chasing after a very well-known physicist {?}, a guy who was tremendously handsome and very bright, and a little erratic. He had been teaching at the University of Washington, and all the ladies were swooning after him--all the wives--were swooning after him, and Alice most particularly, Ralph's wife. And so she left Ralph to chase him.

And she [Alice] had the child, but she wasn't really taking care of her, and she then had her [Joan] go to Portland and stay with her parents, who were Christian Scientists. Ralph went down to see Joan and was absolutely horrified. Her teeth weren't being taken care of, she had tonsillitis, nobody was paying attention. He just wrapped her up in a quilt and brought her home. Alice was off someplace.

He then was faced with what did he do. He had a house, and nobody in it, and this child. So he got some of his graduate students, couples, to come live at the house. She was about four at the time of the breakup and for a couple of years, literally, there were different graduate students who lived in the house and helped Ralph take care of Joan.

Well, it was a very puzzling situation for little Joan because everything was changing all the time. And these young couples were dear, but not much interested in really being parents, in a sense, or helping-parents to, for the child. He [Ralph] realized that this was not the best of circumstances, and he asked his mother to come to take care of Joan and to be at the house. They lived in Wallace, Idaho.

The Gundlach Family, Wallace, Idaho

Bonnie: Ralph's father was a lawyer, born in Kansas City, Missouri. His {meaning Ralph's, or the father's father?} father and mother came from that area. His father had come out, as far as I know, to work for the mines. There were big silver mines in Wallace, Idaho, and the town of Wallace was an interesting little town because all the other little towns were where the miners lived. It's a very awful kind of mining. The silver mining there is like working in mud constantly--heavy, dark, damp sort of stuff. Ralph did it for a while, and he just hated it.

But all the people around, the engineers and so on, lived in Wallace. And they were guys with college backgrounds and their wives were somewhat educated and so on. And so it made it tolerable for his wife, who was a singer. Ralph's mother actually had actually gone to New York as a young woman and studied singing and had aspirations of being a singer, all of which went to pot as soon as she married. And she had four children.

Heidi: That was because of being married? That wasn't because of her husband?

Bonnie: No, it was because of being married and having children and, you know.

Bill: And moving to Idaho?

Bonnie: Well, they were in Missouri for quite a long time. Ralph was really almost a teenager, I think, when they came to Wallace. And the family--the oldest brother was Wilford, and then Betty. And Ralph and then Jean, in that order, these children.

Wilford went to the University of Washington, and he was a marvelously handsome young man, wonderful personality, too. Absolutely opposite of Ralph in looks, he was dark, dark-skinned, dark-haired, different kind of build. They were both big and strong. Wilford was very bright, and a very personable young man, very much loved, and he was an athlete, but Ralph was actually a better athlete--Ralph was a wonderful basketball player, a star basketball player in high school. The only picture I've ever seen of Ralph with hair is his basketball pictures. He had to wear a band to keep his hair out of his eyes. [laughter] Forever after, he never had to wear a band. I don't know when he lost his hair but it was not too long.

Ralph adored Wilford, he really admired him. And so he followed Wilford to the University. Wilford's, I think, special area was actually literature, English literature, but he was also a good athlete. He got a job right after graduation--this was 1924, I think--in China, in Canton, in a university that was a Christian university--practically no universities in China were not religiously supported--and he went to be in charge of athletics and literature.

During the year he was there he wrote wonderful letters which have been typed and are in the family possession. I believe I have copies of them, Jean does, but I haven't unburied some of that stuff. And they were very informative. Chiang Kai-Shek was the warlord at that time and the university was opening and closing practically every day because of the warlords' activities.

Wilford was really enjoying his Chinese students, and his students loved him. But this was the time of small pox. And they had just begun vaccination in '22, '23, '24. People were very questioning of vaccination. They felt if you were healthy, you didn't need a vaccination. He didn't get a vaccination, and he got small pox and died within a matter of days, literally.

Ralph's Choice of Psychology as a Profession

Bonnie: This was an absolutely terrible blow to Ralph and his sisters and the whole family. I think Ralph's way of handling it was just to work harder and he started out--. Ralph's undergraduate, his master's--I think his first degree was political science.

Heidi: Well, his father intended that he would be a lawyer.

Bonnie: I didn't know that.

Heidi: He was pressured--

Bonnie: Really, I didn't know that.

Heidi: That was my impression.

Bonnie: But he had a wonderful time pursuing it. At that time the University of Washington had some really outstanding scholars teaching, Parrington and Savery--and he studied with all of them. They were very lively and challenging to their students. The campus had a real kind of vitality at that time in a particular direction--the intellectual, philosophic, political.

Psychology was still part of philosophy at that time and Ralph got more and more interested in psychology and finally did his Ph.D. at the University of Illinois in psychology and worked--I actually don't know what his PhD thesis was, but I know to do it, he worked in prison. And his assistant was--Leopold and Loeb?

Bill: He was in prison there?

Bonnie: He was in prison there.

And he came back then and was employed at the University of Washington in the then new Department of Psychology, which was identifying itself away from philosophy.

Heidi: He was more in social psychology and research-type work.

Bonnie: Well, social psychology wasn't even thought of at the time Dad started, you know.

Heidi: Right, but it wasn't like clinical or therapeutic.

Bonnie: It was a behavioral, oh totally behaviorally oriented department, on the whole. They hadn't split into any specialties, as far as I know. There was an enormous amount of research, animal research. And Ralph was first involved in that.

Bill: Wasn't Guthrie the leading figure there?

Bonnie: Guthrie was a leading figure there.

Bill: He was in learning, and it was all very behavioral?

Bonnie: Yes, and Ralph absolutely flummoxed them when he refused to subscribe to a totally behavioristic point of view. He just wouldn't do it because he didn't think it was appropriate.

The range of Ralph's research is astonishing. He did research in music, he did research on accommodation {right word?}, you know, how they know how to get home sort of thing in homing pigeons. He did research in sports, he did just an amazing amount of a variety of things.

It was kind of fun often for the young journalists to come around and talk to him. Then they would write little stories in the university paper with, you know, "What do young men turn to in the spring?" kind of titles, and it turns out their genes and their hormones are racing, and all kinds of amusing little

stories that would come out around something that was being researched, or something that had been researched someplace else and discussed.

Ralph's College Jobs, and Summers on Striped Peak

Bill: Bonnie, how did Ralph and his brother happen to go to Washington?

Bonnie: Well, they were living in Idaho and the University of Washington was the big university for the Northwest, I think. It was the largest even then. Other than that, I can't tell you why they chose it. But the University of Idaho was quite small, and Oregon was just farther away, I guess.

Bill: Yes. But they could have gone east, presumably?

Bonnie: They couldn't have afforded it because they all, they worked their way through college. Ralph worked his way through college doing all kinds of jobs. He was--what did they call him?

Heidi: He was the cook in a sorority.

Bonnie: He was a cook in the sorority, but he was sort of an assistant cook in the sorority for a couple of years.

Heidi: He lived in the basement of a sorority. You can tell where his later studies came from. [laughter]

Bonnie: Right. And he did, oh, an awful lot of different kinds of jobs. But he got a teaching assistantship and managed to live on that.

Bill: Was that because his father was out of work during the Depression?

Bonnie: No, his father was never out of work. His father was always law-making in Wallace. He didn't just work for the mines, he had private clientele. His father was a passionate hunter and fisherman. So he spent as much time as he could hunting and fishing, and he had hunting dogs and so on.

Bill: It seems surprising that the boys had to work their way through college, unless that was part of his ethic?

Bonnie: Well, he didn't have any great income. He put himself through college in part by working every summer as a fire lookout on top of Striped Peak, one of the rock peaks outside of Moscow, in that area. And it was a very rugged thing. He was alone all the

summer, and he had to hike five miles to carry his water to the top, to a tent that was sort of cabled down on the top of this peak. He was a lookout and they had flashing signals to other lookouts. And he had a dog.

Heidi: Red.

Bonnie: What?

Heidi: His little dog, Red.

Bonnie: His little dog, Red. You remember these much better, you should be telling this story. Because he told her the stories that I just heard as they slid through.

He wrote a very funny paper, a psychological paper which got printed. He did a study of the smile reflex in dogs. [laughter] The study was prompted by the fact that he had to carry all the flour and everything else up, you know, that he used. And so he cooked something called bannock, which was a kind of a bread with no yeast in it, you know, just a flat thing, and the dog got bannock. And the dog wasn't crazy about that at all. Then occasionally he would have bacon and he would cook things in the bacon fat. And then the dog smiled. [laughter] So Ralph built a whole funny, funny paper on "The Smile Reflex in the Dog" as a sort of spoof, you know, altogether.

Ralph had a lovely, lovely sense of humor about things. When I met him, I think most students in that department tried to have him as their advisor for their MA's. He had so many MA students under his wing, and they all loved him. And they'd go hiking with him--he was a great hiker and actually climbed Mt. Rainier twice in those early days, and that was quite a feat at that time. It's gotten to be a sort of easy thing to do now, by comparison.

Heidi: The equipment is very different.

Bonnie: Yes, very different.

And so there was always some kind of adventure. They would go to the beach, ocean beaches. There was a--the kind of socializing life with students and their faculty was very much more open than it could ever become, I suppose, when the university got bigger and bigger and less and less sort of able to support that kind of thing. One of the things that happened was he got all his gardening done because these MA students lived in digs around Seattle, you know, and they didn't have much

money. And CBS had just started--well, they had had it, I guess, for some time--a marvelous symphony series, the CBS orchestra, I guess.

About one o'clock on Sundays there would be this marvelous concert and his students would come--I mean anybody could come--and they would cook a big meal together at the end of the afternoon. But they came to listen to the symphony, and then they would all go out and work on the garden or, you know, on the house or something, which they enjoyed doing. Ralph, of course, was finishing the house because one of the things about the building of the house is that they did an awful lot of the work.

INSERT

I told you about Ralph actually building a house. He and Ted and a high school teacher whose name I can't remember had actually decided they would experiment with jointly building three houses at the same time. Ted was excited about doing this because he had been studying in Scandinavia on ways to build houses, and families getting together and doing it and saving an awful lot of money because they could custom order. If you custom order in large enough quantities, windows and doors and things, you get what you want. And he designed these houses.

And they had bought their lots. They were tax lots on a dead-end street, and they got them for \$50 each. [laughter] They had six tax lots, jointly, and a woods behind them and a road that came up just right to the place where they would have their garages and so on. And the road would never be built through. That's why the city had these lots that were just wooded and sort of sliding down a hill, you know, they were on the way down. And it still hadn't been built up behind the house.

Heidi: What's the name of the street?

Bonnie: Well, our address was 226-33rd North. I think it has a slight difference now. They have sort of redone the city, and so it's either Northeast or something like that. And the house was, really, quite wonderful, the houses were quite wonderful because they all--they had a kind of joint garden. Everything was really independent, but they made it look as though everything flowed together.

They built their own rockeries and Ralph found that he didn't have to carry heavy rocks if he used coke for making walls. And the gasworks always had these funny, sharp-edged, porous stones, really. And so they had built up the walls to

keep the hill from coming down behind, on one side of a flat area that became the back door garden. And it was all out of this coke which they could handle easily. It wasn't like lugging rocks. Other places they had to put in wooden walls and so on to hold the hill from sliding.

[Interview #?, August 24, 1994]

[begin tape #1 side A]

[Bonnie and Bill and Heidi. Also present: Anthony Bowne]

VII "TRANSITIONS" [JOINT INTERVIEW WITH ANTHONY BOWNE]

Bill: Today is August 24th, Wednesday, we're starting about 1:30 with Bonnie and with Anthony Bowne. Anthony, you were starting to tell us how you met Bonnie.

Anthony: Yes, I was a financial analyst in the car industry in the Midlands, and my then-girlfriend took evening classes in contemporary dance in our local town. We had a professional contemporary company in the town, and she took evening classes with them. I used to drive her to class. And that's how I discovered contemporary dance. I saw the company in performance. That was "Cycles," Bonnie, if you remember?

Bonnie: I do remember it, yes.

Anthony: And saw a class. I'd never known what contemporary dance was before then and it took my interest. I got very interested, and I started doing movement {?} class with the company.

And then she decided to go to the Laban Centre to do her degree in dance, and I was getting a little disillusioned working in industry, so I decided I, too, would go to the Laban to do a one-year postgraduate course. And I did that, and at the end of the year I wanted to stay on.

Also in that first year, as being a student, I was on a scholarship, which meant that I had to do work for the Laban Centre. And my work was to be the weekend caretaker. Once I'd opened up the building, there was very little to do. So I used to go into the theater and watch the head of lighting, Ross Cameron, light student productions, and theater lighting really started to really excite my interest.

So at the end of my year as a student, they asked me if I would stay on to be a graduate assistant in the production department, working for Ross Cameron, who was head of theater production. And a graduate assistant at the Laban Centre is when they pay you the equivalent of a student maintenance grant, around L.3,000 a year now, and you do a job, you learn a job with them. So I did that for a year.

And it was in that year, when I was learning theater lighting and theater production, that you [Bonnie] came up with a notion--and you'll have to talk about this because being just a student I wasn't really in on where your head was--of starting up Transitions. But there was a forerunner to Transitions, and it was called the Centre Dance Ensemble. And you asked Linda Davis to come and run that. So you need to talk about that, really.

I know that I came into the picture because I've got a business background, and I've got these new skills--well, was acquiring these new skills, I certainly didn't have them when we started--of theater production. So I was asked to do some work on it. But where it all came from was out of your head.

Bonnie: Well, I think "out of my head" it was a slow sort of process that we were by 1982 or so, '83, producing a lot of young dancers who were very skillful and were going out in the field, but there wasn't much in the field.

And another part of it was that even when they got into little companies, nobody had time to train them physically, to teach them technique classes, nobody--the company choreographer, who was the head of the company, had very little opportunity to help them break into functioning as a professional in a company. They just drew dancers together and then it was a kind of hit-and-miss situation whether they became a team, or what.

And it was always related to the choreographer. If the choreographer was difficult, circumstances were difficult. And so learning was a very hodgepodge sort of situation for these young people. And yet they felt they were professionals. And I felt that the standard of professionalism within a certain wide band in Britain was terribly helter-skelter. We had tried--.

One thing I should say is that Marion [North] and I agreed that we would never have a company. The desire to have a company is strong in any school. When you're producing very good dancers and good choreography, everybody wants to have those people become a company. And we knew that if we did that it would sink our fortunes totally because all your money goes into the company, it's a bottomless pit. And in England, if you were associated with an educational institution, we would have had to set up something separate, because we couldn't get grants and so on if it was not independently set up.

It was a huge undertaking. And the school at that time was growing so that we were needing space, and the very idea of a company coming in--. When companies come in they are like blisters on the surface because they feel they are so special, no matter who it is, and they need the space and they need the attention and they need--. It can just rob the institution, drain it.

So we made the decision that we would never have a company. If a company were ever to be, it would be a totally separate entity in itself. But we did need this fourth year of training. It had always frustrated me, from the time I came to England, that education in England was three years long. And that was because of their A-level startup, which puts a kid in the equivalent state of being a freshman in a university here, so then three years is all they need because they--.

If a student, for instance, wants to be a geologist, they have to do a geology A-level to get into the geology. There wasn't a dance A-level, although there are now. There have been great developments in this. Not that I can say we have great A-levels yet, but they are getting better all the time.

And so the very idea of having a fourth year--and we called it that from the very beginning, we called it a fourth year of training, and I notice that in the writing that Karen Bell-Kanner does, she calls it a fourth year of training. That got to be quite a thing in England, that some departments felt that students had to have a fourth year. So they developed a fourth year of training. And those had to all be approved by the government because the local authorities have to fund them, and they are not prepared to do fourth years. So ours had to be thought of differently.

Anyway, prior to that, in the spring--I don't remember the year. Do you?

Anthony: 1992.

Bonnie: 1992.

Linda Davis, a very sparkling dance educator-dancer, had come to teach for us. --And we asked her to undertake a kind of coordination of something we called "Centre Dance." Now this was partly, if I remember--now, you correct me because I may get my facts all mixed up--partly because we had a lot of faculty members who were terribly frustrated because they

weren't performing. And how are they going to remain artists and develop as artists unless they were performing?

Well, none of them had quite the pizzazz to really do their own choreography. And it's interesting to look at who was a member of that group: Jean Jarrell {?} and Patty Howell. Patty had a lot to do with the Centre Dance. And they were not outstanding dancers at all. And there were some graduate students, former, who also were part of it. It was a group of only five, I think. But Linda created dances for them. I don't even remember who else choreographed.

And so they did present some work and it was a kind of stimulus. I thought it was pretty feeble, but it was worthwhile and it did a lot for the individuals who were part of it. It was half therapy, I think, in some ways. But it also was beginning to answer a question, and that is, could we support, within our schedule, etc., something that was a fourth year of study and that was aimed at the performer?

Now, there were pressures on us that Anthony probably wasn't even aware of. And that was that we have been forever in competition with the London School of Contemporary Dance, which is older than we are, which was set up to be really a conservatory for a company. It was the training school out of which their dancers came, and they did. And the emphasis was on performance, it was not on creation. It wasn't on even the breadth of dance education at all. It was very much a totally linear kind of thing. and successful in that period of time.

So everything was always compared: were our dancers technically as far along and so on? And I felt that we had reached a point where we had to test that and challenge ourselves too and begin to prove that the training in the Laban Centre in its breadth also included this strong component of training for a professional career as a performer. And that the only way we could do it was to demonstrate it. And we knew it had to take quite a long time.

So it was sort of behind the idea of developing something. And so I made a presentation at--I actually, I think, made the presentation in--did we start in '83?

Anthony: Yes, '83 was the first one.

Bonnie: Yes, well I must have made a presentation at the retreat that we have every year where we take our faculty away, all the faculty we can, about twenty, twenty-five senior faculty, and

younger ones too. We take them away for three days. And we blueprint and discuss the coming year. And it may be a big issue, I mean an issue that isn't about schedules and all the stuff we have to face every day, but what's happening in dance in Britain, what's the relationship of the Laban Centre to it, and so on.

Every year the conference has an overall topic and then a bunch of smaller ones too. So it's a kind of blueprinting of the coming year, but it's also a way of helping the faculty have a perspective on the Centre itself and their part in it, and of tying them together so that you can slowly develop a kind of philosophy, which they contribute to, for the Centre itself--educationally, artistically, and so on.

I presented the idea of having Transitions, which I don't think I'd even named, but I'm sure there's a paper someplace where I presented it, and it caused such a cafoodle, you could not imagine. One of the people broke down in tears of fury at the very idea of it, and I still don't know why. I think it was just one heap of jealousy, is all I could ever come to.

Heidi: But she was part of the Centre?

Bonnie: She was part of the Centre, but she had been in the Centre Dance. And this may be related to the fact that this wasn't a faculty thing, that it was going to be for students. I don't know, but I was stunned at this. And there was a lot of anger. There is every time we present a new course. But this one really astonished me. There's always somebody that thinks it's not wise and so on, and you've got to resolve all that. But you have to go through these discussions, otherwise, you've got people off in corners, you know, and no support.

So we decided to go ahead. And I asked Linda Davis to become the first director of the company because she was eminently suited, she already knew the Centre, she was quite in love with it. And she was able to get a year's leave from the University of Florida at Tallahassee, State University at Tallahassee, where she was--she was not then a tenured member of the department, but somebody they hired constantly. And she came, and we had to put together this whole idea. I mean it was like August, we were still figuring it out.

Bill: Bonnie, a question. By the time the retreat had ended, were people behind the program, were people behind your proposal?

Bonnie: Well, I think the overall--I wouldn't have been able to go ahead if there hadn't been a majority support. What the feelings of the people and what they gnawed, the bones they gnawed on after, I have no idea, but I don't even remember at all. I'm so oblivious to that kind of thing when I'm in the Centre, it's amazing. You'd think I was in a capsule. I walk through and I just don't know what's going on.

And so we started in, and the first thing we needed, of course, was a program. So Linda and I, somehow or other, worked it out. The kids had daily technique class. It's the same formula that we have now, but not quite as intense because we had no bookings. And one of the reasons to bring Anthony in was to help us begin the question of getting bookings.

Did you [Anthony] do the books in the first year?

Anthony: No, I didn't. The first year I was very junior and was only responsible for driving the minibus to the occasional booking [laughter] and doing the production, doing the light, doing the sound, when we got there. I mean that was my only role, and I didn't even do that very well because I really didn't know the job.

Bill: You were learning.

Anthony: I was learning, yeah. And it wasn't until year three, I think, actually, that I actually took over in a sort of managerial sense and booked the tours as well as staging productions.

Bonnie: Well, I think I was doing the booking.

Anthony: Chris deMarr {?} and I did the booking.

Bonnie: Did Chris do most of it?

Anthony: Yes, he did.

Bonnie: Well, between Chris and me--I have no memory of this at all--we must have done the booking. And what we succeeded in in that year--it was a very valuable year for the dancers that were in it. They were all women. They were eager, really lovely kids, lovely kids. And they got a tremendous amount out of working with Linda. Sonya Rafferty {?} talks about it as a really vital experience, and she was in the company at the time.

And it was because Linda was such a good dance educator too. And Linda created things all the time. Everybody in the

Centre laughs because Linda--she writes notes to everybody about anything at any time. And so the place is littered with notes from Linda, you know, it could be just an observation, it could be a question, it could be anything. But she made herself vivid there, and that was healthy for the whole faculty.

She got very interested in the possibility of our doing things with the Tate Gallery, which I had initiated, because I had met the director of the contemporary division, who was a friend of Merce Cunningham's designer, who introduced me to him, a young man named Richard Francis, who has since become not only the head of contemporary art, but the Tate Gallery in Liverpool.

He was very enthusiastic. He was new, and he wanted to bring something contemporary. But he ran smack up against the Tate's stiffnesses. So we had to relate to the education department, it couldn't be the galleries. And Linda just charged right in and made a friend of the head of education and they did some very interesting work in the gallery relating to the paintings, while people walked through the gallery or gathered and watched, that was highly sort of creative and improvisational.

Then we went over, because the head of education there was a friend of the gal at the Victoria and Albert, and I think Marion Gough was a big help on all of this too because she knew these two ladies. And they were really firehorses. And so we did a whole thing the next year with Claudia Gittleman in the Victoria & Albert.

Anthony: Yeah. I didn't actually go to that for some reason. I remember the first year at the Tate Gallery we did something with an Antony Caro exhibit. Very interesting.

Bonnie: Right. And what happened then was that we worked with the visual arts students who came from different colleges to the Tate. So it was an interaction with our students and the visual art students. It was really very healthy. We would love to do more of that, but the organizational part of it is absolutely beyond us, it's so complex. We've just not moved in that direction. It's a whole area to be developed, I think.

Heidi: So you did not have set choreographed pieces?

Bonnie: Oh, yes, they had a whole concert.

Anthony: We did that first year, it's just we didn't have any places to perform in. But we actually had a very good work by Jerry Pearson. {} And also by Ian Spink--oh, not Spink, that was the second year. Larry Booth.

Bonnie: Larry Booth made a piece, and Linda made a very nice piece. It was more a lyric sort of piece, wonderful for the dancers. I was enthusiastic about it. Not everybody loved it as much as I did, because I loved the freedom that she got--.

Anthony: "Julibration" it was called.

Bonnie: "Julibration." It was a really very upbeat piece, quite lovely. And the kids were fine. The costumes were a little weird, but that's another story. Everything was being put together in sort of hurries and not thought-through.

But we learned tremendously out of the year. And the kids had a good year. They didn't have a year that parallels what we do now, at all, but I don't think they missed a thing in the sense of learning and growing.

Bill: They must have felt very committed to as part of being in on the ground floor?

Bonnie: Absolutely, they did, they did. We certainly didn't make much in the way of waves in London, because we only performed at the Laban Centre and one or two other places that we were invited. It wasn't heavy in the performance end at all, but Linda kept them at things all the time, so every day was lively and demanding.

And then the next year Linda had to go back, and we searched for a director, and I had met and gotten to know Claudia Gittleman {}. Claudia was rather unhappy at the Alwin Nikolais-Murray Louis school because she wasn't being used properly. She had stayed out of universities, she was totally related to professional situation, and she did her own solo concerts and she did choreography. She potlucked around all the time, and she was willing to come. I knew her from your [Heidi] studying with her at Connecticut College too.

Heidi: And with Hanya in Colorado.

Bonnie: Yes, right, she came out of another strand of the contemporary background, out of Hanya Holm.

Well, Claudia came. Claudia was another kind of personality. By this time we'd organized the schedule better, we had invited--I'd have to look and see, it's not in here, is it? [looking at Laban Centre history] Well, we'll have to look for who we invited, the choreographers. Claudia did a piece--.

Anthony: Ian Spink did a piece.

Bonnie: Ian Spink, and that was really a technically demanding piece. I don't remember who the others were at the moment, but there were four new pieces.

And we had more bookings, we were getting better organized on that. Claudia did this work, which she loved doing, at the Victoria & Albert Museum, in which she chose to relate to the architectural setting in one part of the museum which was like a great atrium. She didn't relate to the paintings and the stuff in it. Victoria & Albert is quite a different place, it's so stuffed. And so it was a kind of architectural relationship, which was interesting and worked out really quite well. She also did a big piece in the Great Hall.

Anthony: Goldsmiths' College, yes.

Bonnie: So she challenged the kids in new ways with new kinds of ideas, with using other spaces, etc. And again the company--did we have a boy that year? Didn't we have that boy Paul from Ireland? A very weak dancer, but a very nice young man who's gone on, believe it or not, to be a dancer in Ireland, and now I believe he's in Scotland, amazingly enough--

Anthony: Yes, he is.

Bonnie: --and to really make a dent in Irish dance. He was a boy who came to us as a student with two left feet and not much else. And he progressed slowly, he was a late developer kind of a boy, but a nice, nice person. So they worked around him and used him. Again, the concerts were well-received. Not everybody liked every piece or anything, but they never do.

And then we went into our third year. By this time he [Anthony] was getting more and more involved.

Anthony: I'd started to do the bookings.

Bonnie: Yes, we couldn't leave bookings to me, I'm too helter-skelter, and Chris was getting more and more involved with Dance Theater

Journal and all the publicity, etc. So Anthony began to really take on that part as well as the touring.

But you [Anthony] should talk now. We got you into it.
[laughter]

Anthony: Well, who was the director that third year, was it Senta Roy {?} who was our third director?

Bonnie: Yes. It was Senta. And then came Linda Tarnay.

Heidi: Senta from Canada?

Bonnie: Yes, from Canada.

Anthony: From Simon Fraser. And that was really the first year that we really set the agenda as we've followed it since. We had a British tour, and it was our first overseas tour. We went to Hong Kong, Taiwan, at the end of that year. So things had started to change, and I think it was really the first year that we were more than a student group, that people started to see us as a professional training company in some sense, wouldn't you say?

Bonnie: Mm-hmm, yes.

Anthony: That year was really the change. And we were auditioning for dancers each year, we wanted nine or ten.

Heidi: Was that different, had you auditioned every year?

Anthony: Well, up until the third year, all the dancers were from the Laban Centre.

Bonnie: We did audition, but we didn't attract from the outside, and we didn't do a lot of publicity from the outside. I think we were ambivalent about whether it should be all our students at first.

Anthony: Yes. And there started to be a demand for the course. I mean, it was still early on, so we were by no means famous at the time, but there was starting to be interest in what we were doing from outside. And we were developing a tour program, people were wanting to book us more.

And in the summer of that year we went to Hong Kong and Taiwan, to the international festival dance academies. So we weren't booked as a professional dance company, we were

representing the Laban Centre as a training school. But it was our first touring, we were very successful at that. And we've returned to the Far East virtually every year since then.

What we were trying to do, I mean I remember from year three, is we were trying to develop a touring program for the dancers that gave them a chance to perform in a variety of different arenas, from schools through to two thousand-seat, major theaters. We recognized that the only way to get that sort of performing opportunity for them was to behave like a professional dance company in terms of marketing and publicity. I mean, you know, things like this [indicating]. We had really set this format for the brochure by that third year. I think it was the first year that we had a brochure like this.

And so we acted in terms of relationships with venues, like a professional dance company. And it was the only way we determined we could actually get those performing opportunities for our dancers. And so we thought of ourselves as professional, didn't we?

Bonnie: Yes.

Anthony: Although it was very definitely a training company. We have two names: The Advanced Performance Course at the Laban Centre, and Transitions Dance Company. So we're a training course, but in public we are Transitions Dance Company.

Bill: And do people come into the fourth year course without having gone through the first three?

Bonnie: Oh, sure, if they can pass the audition.

Anthony: And they have to have had a three-year training at a recognized school.

Bonnie: Or they couldn't come otherwise. Or the equivalent of it in some way.

Anthony: It needn't be from the Laban Centre.

Bonnie: No. We did open it up then.

Anthony: And these days many, many people audition for us from other schools. It so happens that most of the people that are successful do come from the Laban Centre, but I mean--we really do feel that we are not being biased.

Bonnie: No. No, it's true. And a lot of it has to do with the nature of the training which we have discovered is absolutely vital for the dancers, to be able to work with a variety of choreographers, is to have an extraordinary flexibility of responsiveness. If they are asked to improvise, they need to improvise. If they are asked to absolutely follow something that is presented to them and to pick it up quickly and to pick up the qualities of movement, you know, all in one go--these are things they have to develop.

And so the kids at the Laban Centre get a lot of the improvisational training and a lot of variety of work. And quite a good deal of performance experience, which isn't so in some of the other schools.

[end tape 1, side A]
[begin tape 1, side B]

Bill: You were describing the Centre and the company as the culmination of ideas in training that you had had and seen and experienced with Martha and the Cornish School and so on. Could you tell a little more about that?

Bonnie: Well, I think that all the experience that I had had, both within and without universities, that is within the professional field and within the educational field, had convinced me that the kind of training that we gave dancers in the United States, and said was professional training, I felt was too narrow.

That was something that interested me, and I'd worked at in various ways in the United States, but never within an institution that supported the idea as a principle. And so the really great thing of my going to the Laban Centre is that I was given the kind of support from Marion who completely agreed with this and needed a new thrust for the Centre. And it just married very well.

For me, it was a marvelous opportunity to utilize all the kind of experience I had had. Nothing was "not used" in some way, whether it related to community work or to therapy or whatever, because I had knowledge of all of these aspects of dance. -And I was deeply concerned that dancers had almost a historic attitude that their dancing life would be over when they were forty.

You know, that's built into the ballet dancer, that when you're old you have to either become a character dancer--. And

few companies provide this. Some of the European ones did and kept dancers on. The Paris Opera, Moscow, a few other places.

Heidi: Or you go upstairs and you make toe shoes.

Bonnie: Yes, or you go upstairs and make toe shoes, exactly, that sort of thing, you find other little crafty things that you might do.

I thought that it was a hell of a waste because I thought that we looked at dance so narrowly, that dance was just performance, and dance needs everything--writers and teachers, etc. And I felt the Centre was a place that could forward that sort of principle, and it was totally--I mean it wasn't as though I were the only one thinking it. Marion was, and many of the people that were brought onto the staff had this sort of vision.

So Transitions was a very happy part of that line of thinking. And it was meeting, really, something that the Centre needed, and that was to visually prove to outside audiences that the standard of work at the Centre was equal to that of any professional school or group. And indeed, we have proved it so well with Transitions that I think I'm right in saying that Anthony's relationship with impresarios and presenters and groups is totally different than it was six or seven years ago.

Anthony: Yes, and it did take a time, because presenters have this notion of student groups because everywhere else, I think, when you're a group from a school, you are a student group. And the whole ethos is that amateur sort of student thing.

We were different, but it took a time for people to realize that we were different, that the conception was professional, that these were people that we took, first of all--that they had already completed their normal training before we took them. And we were working on a higher level. It took a time, it really did take a time. But now, in Britain at any rate where we are known, we tour every year from March until June or July. We are treated as a professional company of a very high standard.

Bonnie: And they are dancing a lot less in wacky little places, and many more really good theaters, and being presented quite differently.

Bill: Being treated with a whole lot more respect, I assume?

- Heidi: You've had now also more professional venues even in London. That's kind of a big turning point, isn't it?
- Bonnie: Well, that we had to do ourselves, really. I don't remember when we were first presented by John Ashford {?}. It was seven or so years ago, was it?
- Anthony: We've been at the Bloomsbury Theater for four, now, so I would say seven years ago was our first London venue other than colleges. Previously we performed at the Laban Centre each year, and also at London College Roehampton.

But seven years ago John Ashford at The Place Theater --. The Place Theater in London is the biggest program of contemporary dance. It's actually the theater of the London School of Contemporary Dance and they program contemporary dance throughout the year. And he has a season in the spring called "Spring-Loaded" and we were presented two or three years running for one night in his season. The theater seats about two hundred, and I'm sure we sold out our one night.

But they would only let us get in the day of the show at 9:00 in the morning to present a program that evening. We have high production standards, we are known for that, and we really need longer than to get in on the day of a major London show. So after doing two or three years of that, we actually went to another theater, the Bloomsbury Theater--which is just around the corner, it's in central London--which is a very nice proscenium arch theater with five hundred seating capacity and negotiated two nights with them initially. Now we do three. And they allowed us the day before our first night to get in and do the production.

Interestingly, we've been there--this is our fourth year this year--since we've started going there, we were about the first dance company to go there, and others have followed. Now they are actually building up a dance season that we initiated, which is quite rewarding.

- Bonnie: I think another part of this was that John Ashford lumped us on a weekend, or time when it was student companies. And these were student companies, these were not post-graduate companies. They were, some of them, very sloppy affairs, and we didn't like this association at all, we thought it was completely wrong. And John wouldn't listen and present us professionally in other parts of the "Spring-Loaded" program. He just had a blank we were "student."

Heidi: Was that part of the competition with The Place?

Bonnie: No, no, nothing. It was John. John is his own man, and he makes these kinds of decisions and sometimes you sway him and sometimes you don't. He's a very decent guy, but he just follows his own mind. He wasn't upset, I don't think, that we left, it didn't make any difference to him. But it was very important to us that we move out and be seen professionally.

We also needed for the kids to have the opportunity of being seen two nights in a row, to perform in a theater. And it was the only time we could get critics. Because you can't get critics. They come once in a while to the Laban Centre, but it's kind of like going to the boondocks, in their mind.

Exactly the same as New York, anything above 57th Street, for years, no critic had to cover. So everything that went on at the 92nd Street Y was covered only if the critic wanted to do it. And it was impossible to get critics up there for important shows. That changed gradually over the years, but I can remember calling critics and them saying, "Oh, no, above 57th, that's not professional." [laughter].

The same attitude in London. They will go right around in the middle of the West End. If it's an important thing, they will go there too. But you have to prove it's important or strange or something. So gradually we have had more reviewing. We still don't have--we always watch with trepidation to see what our competition is on our opening night, I mean, who's at Sadler's Wells and who is at someplace else, because we know the critics won't come to us at all.

But nevertheless, we've had a few, and mostly our reviews have been very good, very supportive. Bland, sometimes, but nevertheless--. The reviewing in England isn't very interesting.

Anthony: No. But certainly for the last four or five years, our London season has always resulted in at least one review in a national or Sunday paper.

Bill: That must help in recruiting students, doesn't it?

Bonnie: I think overall it is very important to the Centre, the Laban, that Transitions is seen. It's made the difference in our foreign touring, particularly, of people deciding they want to come to the Laban Centre because they see the standard. And

they don't see that standard very many places at all, so it's a stimulus immediately. And it is within England.

But it's harder for the kids in England because they have to go where they can get grants. And there are now quite a number of universities, polytechnics and so on, with rather weak programs, where they get mandatory grants. So they end up going to those. That means that the local government must give the student a grant. And it isn't as expensive for the local government because the mandated college receives central government funding which covers buildings and all that sort of stuff.

We receive nothing, so what we have to charge is what it costs to educate a student per year, which is quite heavy. Not as heavy as some universities here, but heavy for a British student whose--even the upper middle class parents are not used to paying for higher education for their students. Their incomes aren't parallel to the Americans', and they don't have the built-in habit of starting a college fund from the birth of the child, you know. So it's a different story.

Anthony: Though I think that actually Transitions, and what Bonnie set up, has been enormously useful to the Laban Centre as a marketing tool. I mean, that's certainly not what it was set up for, you set it up because you felt there was a genuine need for that training. But as the public face of the Laban Centre, and dancing at a very high level, it's been so important.

The Laban Centre in Britain has been associated with dance and education because that's where it started, and people have long memories. So to be known for training professional dancers has taken much longer to get that message across. And that's what Bonnie came to London to do, to set up that side of it. In 1974?

Bonnie: Yes.

Heidi: And before you had to prove the Laban Centre to the bigger public, you had to prove dance theater to the faculty.

Bonnie: [laughter] That's pre-Transitions, we are concentrating on Transitions.

Going back to Transitions, that year that Senta was the director, the standard of intake was already increasing, the quality of the students coming in. Training at the Centre was changing too, and this two or three years was already a

technical stimulus, so that the teachers were giving more to the students because there was something to be aimed for, something the kids could see, something the teachers had a sort of vested interest in, so to speak.

And it was interesting, there were a lot of fusses amongst the faculty, little naggy things about the times, the fact that Transitions took space, and, you know, all those little tiny things that could be naggy. I don't hear that any more at all. It is such a part of the Centre, and recognized by all of the faculty now as how vital it is, that if we say we are going to stop it everybody goes into a panic.

I've proposed we stop it on a couple of occasions because I said, "If we're not going to get the kind of director we need, I'd rather see it not go." Because it hangs on your company director to an enormous extent. And if we didn't get that quality, I just thought, the hell with it. We should not lose what we've achieved by offering something that's going to take us downhill. And that created a lot of, "No, we'll solve the problem somehow." I mean it galvanized a few souls.

Gradually we've actually tried to find ways--I don't think we're totally successful yet--of making it more a part of the Centre. That is, inviting second-year students to watch rehearsals, having workshops for students with the company, having developed now what's called an honors workshop--is that the word that's used?

Anthony: Honors workshop, yes.

Bonnie: Honors workshop, which came from an idea that I had at the 92nd Street Y, so that students in their third year can be invited into the honors workshop, and that's the top most technical training. I don't think it's given the attention it should be given, to make it an honors workshop, and I think that there are kids in there that should be checked out, you know, when they start to get lazy about getting to class and so on. Because you really have to be tough with them. They are not tough enough with themselves. I think that's something we have to deal with. It's only in its second year.

So we've been trying to incorporate the staff, even though they are not directly--a long period of time faculty members who were choreographers have been deeply resentful they've never been invited to choreograph. And that has been a very hard thing. But I absolutely refuse to invite anyone just because they are a member of the faculty. If they are going to

be invited, they have to be a good choreographer. And none of them are good enough, so far. That's hard to say, 'but it's true.

They are good in certain things and in certain ways, and they grow in all kinds of things. And maybe some day somebody will. But nobody has yet proved that they could make a work. [laughs] And that's pretty hard, because we've had some works that are terrible, too. I mean, we make mistakes. But even that seems to have been accepted. Does it? Has it?

Anthony: I think it's still resented. There is resentment from certain members of the faculty who see themselves as choreographers and who don't get the chance to work with the company.

Heidi: Can they audition for the Choreography Fund?

Bonnie: No, it doesn't go that way.

Heidi: So how do you choose the choreographers? How was it in the beginning and how did it change?

Bonnie: In the very beginning, before the Choreography Fund, it was direct invitation. And in some cases it was somebody like Jerry Pearson {} who happened to be at the Laban Centre and we invited him. And that's happened a number of times. It was always also the person who came to direct the company choreographed.

Heidi: Like Linda.

Bonnie: Right. And then it was just invitation of people we thought were appropriate and we could get. I think actually it was very important that we didn't have Centre choreographers. It would have been a bonnie's nest. And I just think it would have been wrong.

It was important for us to have outside people coming to the Centre. It was important for the Centre, important for the company, and very important for him [Anthony] in terms of publicity and selling, because you're selling your choreographers too, their names. And our names have been getting bigger all the time, so big that we're liable not to have one because her management is trying wriggle out of it right now. We can see the handwriting and the wriggle. So Anthony said he doesn't think we're going to have that choreographer.

Heidi: Oh, who is that?

Bonnie: You wouldn't know her here. Amanda Miller, an American who has been with Forsythe--

Anthony: Stuttgart Ballet.

Bonnie: Stuttgart Ballet. She's quite an outstanding choreographer, and I saw her at Bagnolet {?} and invited her--I mean we gave her an award. But she's already being courted by so many big ballet companies. She's left the company, but still has a very close relationship to them.

Anthony: She has her own company now and they actually presented a show in London beginning of this month, beginning of August, at Queen Elizabeth Hall on the South Bank.

Bonnie: Did it go well?

Anthony: Very well, apparently. Sean saw the show and thought it was great.

Bonnie: She's an interesting choreographer. And I think she, herself, would love to do it. But her management is managing her, and they've got bigger irons in the fire. So it will be interesting to see if she's able to say, "I want to do it."

Many of the choreographers we've had have wanted to do it because they wanted to come to England. They could have had bigger things, and what we pay is very small. And they came because they wanted to come, and that's always been very important, because their attitude is so different when they want to do it, it's not just a job.

Bill: Why do they want to?

Bonnie: Why? I think they want to come to England, for one thing. They are French, Portuguese, you know. They want to get a toe in the door. I think that now, Transitions' reputation is quite good, and so they know their work will be seen because we perform work more than most companies. There'll be forty performances in a year of a work in all kinds of different places. That puts a man's--or woman's--name in places that are very important to them. Nothing may happen, but one thing may happen.

And with many of the choreographers who have come, like David Dorfman, a young American choreographer, he's been back

to England a number of times, creating works in Scotland and different parts of England and so on. For some of the choreographers, particularly if they have the chutzpah that David does, they could do more with the fact.

Now Della Davidson is very interested in choreographing in London, having her company seen in London. So it all opens--it has great value for the choreographers. Some of them know that, some of them. And fortunately we haven't had an Amanda Miller situation before.

Anthony: There's a first time for everything. But we do more international touring than any other British contemporary company and that's appealing for choreographers to know they are going to get their work seen in so many different countries.

Bonnie: Yeah, right.

Anthony: And I think an important point to bring out, Bonnie, because it's another unique thing about Transitions, is that we don't buy existing work, and we don't reconstruct other people's pieces, that all of our choreography is new, on Transitions.

Bonnie: That was a commitment from the beginning, that we had a responsibility not just to the performers but also to young choreographers, emerging choreographers, guys on the way up, to give them the opportunity to come to England, or--if they were English--to create something on Transitions that would be as widely seen, that it was a benefit for them. And most of them see that, I mean most of them immediately see that.

After the Choreography Fund was established--

Heidi: Which was in what year?

Bonnie: This was our--we just had our eighth year of the Choreography Fund. So we began giving an award each year in North America, and the award was to make a work for Transitions. And so every year we've had an American or Canadian choreographer. This year we will have a Canadian, which delights us, because we haven't had, except one Canadian, and she happened to lay a very square egg and we never performed her work. We are looking forward to having a Canadian because that's valuable both for the Canadians and for us.

Heidi: And who is that?

Bonnie: Her name is Yvonne Kutz {?}. She's not terribly well known outside of Canada, and she's based in Ottawa. But she's worked with the Group de la Place Royale, which is a very interesting experimental project in Montreal. So we now have, because of the number of choreographers we've been in touch with, a kind of lovely network of people who had a good experience with us. And so they support Transitions.

Heidi: This is the choreographers?

Bonnie: This is the choreographers. And in many cases, with the European choreographers, our dancers have danced in their companies. I mean they've had an opportunity.

The other part of our international touring that's important is a funny one, but it's interesting to watch. Many of the British kids have never been abroad except for vacation or something like that. The idea of going abroad to look for a job, even though we have, you know, the new economic unified situation [European Community] in Europe and so on, it's still very scary. Who do you get in touch with? How do you get in touch with them? How do you handle a language you don't know? And so on. Taking them abroad, that just totally wipes that fear out of most of them.

Anthony: Right.

Bonnie: They don't have a hesitation now for flipping across the Channel to get to an audition. And some of them have made out very, very well, and quite a number of our kids are dancing in European companies. It's so fascinating to watch their network grow. They identify as Transitions dancers and they are identified as Transitions dancers, and that's a plus in employment where Transitions is known.

Bill: How did you come up with the name Transitions?

Bonnie: It was pretty simple. For me, I kept finding myself saying the word "transitions." This is the transition from being a gifted student to a fully-fledged professional, so the name became Transitions.

I think the thing that I've discovered--and I'd love to hear what he [Anthony] says about this--is that we have embarked on something unique, and that is the distinction--and it's a distinction between what I would call dance education, which goes on for all the undergraduate years--and artist education. And it's another level, another standard.

It's the kind of thing that happens when, say, Juilliard selects four or five of their most brilliant students and they create a chamber group and they perform, sponsored by Juilliard, for a year or so. It's that experience of the doing that changes them from being very gifted students to being something quite special in terms of knowledge, learning how to work together, how to be a part of an ensemble. To be part of something that's bigger than you by yourself. And it's the objective of being able to realize the choreographer's vision in performance, you know.

That's the thing that's bigger than you, that vision. And you're a part of it, and you make it happen, but only because you're a part of it, not because you're the whole hog. So much of dance is competition, and that we've tried to work away from.

Anthony: Certainly by the end of the year I've always found that they [Transitions] are people that I'm proud to be working with. I don't see them as students and me as a teacher by the end of the year. I mean they are fellow professionals who I am proud to work with.

Last year was our 10th anniversary, and when we were researching the ten years to write up a book about it we looked at the employment record of the people that have left Transitions over the last ten years, because there's over a hundred of them now and they are virtually, without exception, working in dance.

And if you compare that to any other, it's quite remarkable. There's something outside of just the technical training they get. I mean it's the artistry, I think, they become dance artists, and that makes them, on the one hand, much more employable, that people want to work with them, but on the other hand makes them find the opportunities.

Bonnie: And they become articulate about it, too. Dancers are not noted for being articulate and one of the things we really work on with the kids during the year is how to talk about Transitions. We say to them--. Especially on international touring, we never know when some radio person gallops up to a dancer because she's pretty and cute and wants to interview her or asks us for somebody to send to interview--. We have to see to it they can all talk, because they will make idiots of themselves if they don't. And they are often on television.

It makes them jump into a new level of thinking. And I think that articulateness--which they practice also amongst themselves, they talk about the work and stuff all the time--and also the teacher training, getting them responsible for teaching in schools and all kinds of situations, taking responsibility--. We keep handing the responsibilities over to them.

Bill is very good about this, he's very conscious of this handing over.

Anthony: Yeah, Bill Cassidy {?} is our company director at the moment and he is excellent about that.

[end tape 1, side B]
[begin tape 2, side A]

Bonnie: {?} became the director and then things changed after that, really, having a long span of direction, somebody who stayed with us.

Bill: Who was the first director?

Bonnie: The very first director was Linda Davis, the second was Claudia Gittleman, the third was Senta Roy {?}, the fourth was Linda Tarnay {?}. And Linda Tarnay came from NYU. She had taught at the Centre, we liked her--had she taught at the Centre? No.

Anthony: Well, I hadn't met her before.

Bonnie: No, I think I just invited her. I can't actually remember, but I liked Linda a lot. She had a lot of experience, she had been in many different companies.

Heidi: She'd had her own company.

Bonnie: She'd had her own company, and she was eager to actually come and could get a year off from NYU. And Linda--. It was interesting, because we got a real feel--. Each of the people who directed the company was different. And you got such a different sense, Anthony and I did, of how they functioned.

I can remember Claudia Gittleman coming up the stairs and saying she was leaving, she was in a state of frustration over something, and I said "Well, you can't leave, just plain and simple, it's not possible." So we talked the thing through, and it worked itself out.

I think that Senta went into a tizzy at one point because she had been pretty aggressive with this company, and they were distancing from her. And she had to change her manner of working with them. And that was the year we had Matthew and a wonderful group of kids--very creative, they have all gone on to create companies and stuff--and they had ideas, you know. And so they questioned things. And she was not handling that too well.

Linda was marvelous, didn't have that problem. And then Linda Tarnay came. And Linda Tarnay was--we got the distinct impression that Linda was doing the company sort of with her left hand, and her right hand and her interests were social in London. She didn't devote herself to the company in the way we felt was necessary, and we had had a very good example with Linda Davis--it was good that she was the first one and so devoted because we knew that that devotion was absolutely essential.

So Anthony and I were often picking up pieces, little things you know, crabby things that would happen, or unhappy things and so on. We were concerned about having a new person every year. We knew we were not really going to develop unless we had somebody who would stay longer. That's when we went shopping for somebody and I called Bella Lewitsky who I knew had trained her company. She trained them how to teach, she trained them in improvisation, she trained them in all kinds of things. So if they had been in her company, they had been through a lot.

She was very demanding, and they were expected to spend twelve hours a day with her. When I called her she said there was somebody leaving the company and he might be interested, and it was Sean Green. Well, Sean came and [laughter] it was a startling first year.

Bill: How startling?

Anthony: Well, it's interesting, because until then the people that had directed Transitions were dance educators who had some professional experience but they were educated first and foremost. Sean Green was the opposite. He was a dance professional. He had spent twenty years dancing for the Bella Lewitsky company. And his educational experience was that Bella's company did a lot of workshop teaching while they are on the road, but he wasn't a graduate even, and he was a dance professional. And so it was a very different person.

He really struggled in his first year. He really didn't know what he was coming into. He thought he was coming to direct, I think, a professional company, even though he had been told what he was getting. He thought he was getting a professional company, and he treated the dancers initially as if they were seasoned professionals that were as passionate about dance as he was because--oh, he's the most passionate dancer I've ever come across in terms of passion for being on stage and dancing.

So he handled them incorrectly. He didn't think he had to force them to come to class or to rehearsal because he assumed they would have the same passion as he did. And he got it wrong, and about the time he realized he'd got it wrong he was already in trouble because he had already set up wrong attitudes in the company.

So we struggled that year, didn't we, and this is the year that we actually had to fire two dancers.

Bonnie: Yes. But the silly thing was he wanted to be loved [laughter] and that's danger in the first place. He would identify with the dancers--and then, of course, be mad at them too--but he would identify in such a way that he never realized that he was a director, and that he really had to keep a distance, had to have certain objectivity, he couldn't flirt with the girls--he's a very sexy sort of a guy, and he's ribald too, you know.

He loved telling crazy stories and acting in a slightly crazy way. So this was just license for the kids in many ways. And they began to manipulate him, as quick as bunnies. They were good dancers on stage, but they were a rotten company off stage, in many ways.

And the funniest evidence I ever had of how he identified was that he came up stairs to ask us--he was in trouble with the company--and we gave him, Anthony and I, detailed procedure: he was to go back and talk to the students, and this was what he was to say, and he was to say it in just such a way. And it was clear and it was final.

I happened to go downstairs and overheard him start this discussion with the students by saying, "They said [laughter] I should--" And we knew we were off on a bad foot then. He just didn't get it through his bloomin' head the whole year. And that was a difficult year. Halfway through the year we had already--because all of this wasn't showing up so much--we had

hired him for the next year on a three-year contract. And I thought, cripes, we have made the most awful mistake!

But somehow or other, he also has an ingenuous, dear quality about him, and he really wanted to learn. Gradually, gradually, it got through to Sean how to behave, and he got very, very much better. And he was with us six years and during those six years Sean grew a great deal. He really began to understand what artistic education was.

He still is clumsy in many ways as a director, completely clumsy. He's no good--we had to work around the fact that he doesn't speak well about dance, he speaks emotionally. So we had to just protect that kind of situation, not put him in those kinds of situations. But he's so charismatic that workshops he taught, kids followed him like the Pied Piper, you know, little boys, and he'd have everybody involved. It was quite remarkable.

It didn't always work, but he got very much better, better and better. The funny thing is that we were outgrowing him too. And by the time he decided to leave because of his family needs, we were already needing something else. We needed a better standard of educational presentation, we needed a better articulation of what the art is, which he couldn't do. There are a lot of things that Bill is now contributing that meet that kind of need. I hope Bill will go on growing because I think he has a lot of potential.

We have had the funny circumstance, in that we have always allowed the choreographer, that is the company director, to create a work. Well, that was fine when you only had one year with a person, they only created one work. But if you had Sean for six years, and you had a Sean Green work every year--. After we saw the first year's piece, which we told him wasn't up to what we needed, well, he accepted it. And then he tried a second year. He didn't try after that at all because he isn't a choreographer.

And the only exception was the final group concert that the kids gave the last year. He created a duet and it was some duet! It was Sean in bed. Really, the floor was a great big bed, as far as I was concerned.- He was all over it with a pretty partner. Very, very heartfelt, and so on, but not a great piece at all.

Bill: He danced it?

Bonnie: Yes, he danced it. He's a good dancer, handsome body and very, very good. And he made a real contribution, it was valuable time. Whatever the little problems were, they were things you could live with. I'm sure that will be true with Bill. We'll have to live with a lot with Bill that drives you up a tree, but he's also growing.

So that's where we are.

Heidi: So who picked up the speaking aspect that Sean didn't do?

Bonnie: Oh he did speak, enough, enough. But very often I did lecture demonstrations. If we were in a situation that I felt Sean wouldn't do a good job, then I would do it. It's usually on tour internationally.

Anthony: If we were touring internationally then Bonnie and often Marion would be with us as well. And they would meet any VIP's.

Bonnie: He was no good at meeting VIP's at all.

Anthony: And when we toured in Britain, then I would do that role. I mean he would still speak in workshops and at performances sometimes.

Bonnie: He could do that quite well, with a great deal of feeling. I mean he wasn't intellectually brilliant, but there was such an eagerness and, you know, there was something beguiling about him which was really good. So we just forgave him and we knew we couldn't have everything.

Bill: Sounds like the company director reported to you and Marion?

Bonnie: To me and Anthony, essentially.

Bill: And did the director also have autonomy as far as picking pieces to be performed?

Bonnie: No. We have never been able to have anybody that we trusted to be able to do that. Sean couldn't, from beans. Some of the others might have been able to, but that circumstance didn't arise.

Bill will want this. One of the things we have had to cool with Bill was that he started out the year--and we've heard this before--with "my company." [laughter] And he's giving that up now, slightly, you know. In a funny way half of you has to say, "This is my company," and you have to devote

yourself to it that way, but you can't say that, because it changes the whole thing, it isn't their company.

You have to realize that you're letting them go, that you're going to let them go, that you're turning responsibility --you are an educator of another level. And it's a unique place. I mean, we don't have them running around the world doing this kind of thing. So they are all learning.

And I think Bill is learning that. I think when they learn it actually they are so much better off, because they don't have to carry that terrible responsibility of "my company." And the "my company" thing leads to all kinds of things that are bad, like being personally insulted by somebody not coming to rehearsal, by being personally hurt by somebody who says, "I don't like what you're doing." And kids will say that, "I don't want to do that piece."

I remember Julia Clark, who refused to do a piece, to a choreographer, who practically had to take her and spank her, and eventually she got kicked out, because she--she was above it all, you know, that kind of thing. Those are things you have to deal with. And if you have set up the "my company" thing, you're stuck with it. This is dangerous.

Bill: Have people who have come out of the program either as choreographers, directors, or students been able to replicate what you've done anyplace else?

Anthony: It hasn't happened yet.

Bonnie: I'm sure someplace it will happen, but I'll tell you, it can't happen without the kind of institutional support that we have from the Centre. It's so logically a part of the Centre, and it's so costly to the Centre. Truth is, it's the course that probably loses the most money in a year, but it's one of those courses like some graduate courses that you do, and you know they are going to lose money but you've got to do them because they are important.

Anthony and my salaries are paid by the Centre, and Siân Prime's assistant's salary is paid by the Centre. And now Lars, our technical assistant's, is paid by the Centre. Those things--and the space and office the telephone and so on and so on--it's all paid by the Centre. We don't have to be responsible for that.

But you break even within--.

Anthony: Well, what's happening overall now is that the fee income from the students that do pay, because we are starting to have to give scholarships to get the dancers that we want, but the income that we do get from the students pays the salaries. But that doesn't make any contribution towards profits for the Laban Centre.

Bonnie: Pays our salaries?

Anthony: Yes.

Bonnie: Really?

Anthony: Yes.

Bonnie: That's better than I thought.

Anthony: And the touring breaks even, generally breaks even. British touring definitely has to break even. Overseas touring we hope breaks even, but occasionally we'll have a shortfall, we'll budget a shortfall, and we'll say, "Well, can we afford to go to Japan? It's going to cost us L.3,000." And then Marion makes the decision, is it worth it.

Heidi: It is if you get these students inspired.

Bonnie: Exactly. If we get three students it covers it.

Anthony: And generally the answer's yes, it is worth doing. I mean, we are, as I've said, a powerful marketing tool for the Laban Centre, particularly internationally. And so what it costs is deemed, at the moment, to be worth it for the Centre.

Bonnie: I think it would be hard to set up something like that in an arbitrary fashion. I think the fact that this has grown organically out of a philosophy, a center, an established institution, gives it a strength and a sense of direction that would otherwise be very hard.

There are--actually, Central Ballet, which is a school, one of the major ballet training schools, has a student company that in their third or fourth year is totally supported by British Gas. Because it's ballet, they get corporate money, and that pays for their touring all around. So those kids get quite a bit of training in touring, in ballet, which is great.

We couldn't get that money because we are not ballet. It just is fascinating that--. I don't know if we ever will, but

I think we may come out with some ideas sometime of special projects and things like this, that now that we've reached a stage where we're recognized as a very professional standard company, we might on a special project get Arts Council or some other kind of funding.

We haven't tried for it. Because we haven't yet come to the point where we can say, we are going to not do a month of touring etc., etc., and devote it to this project, which is a gamble. But I've been bringing it up for discussion. I would love to see perhaps a project done with Joanna, but at the moment I'm not willing to say Transitions will be the dancers she'll have till I know what the project is.

Heidi: To do like a site-specific thing?

Bonnie: A site-specific thing. Something that would be wonderful for the kids. But I want it to be also very vivid publicly, you know, to get attention. I don't want it to be something that's just a boondocky deal.

Heidi: How about Cristo and Joanna Haygood {?} on the London Bridge?
[laughter]

Bonnie: Well, now there's an idea. Where would the dancers be--hang from the rafters.

Bill: Transitions Wrapped. [laughter]

Bonnie: That's an idea. Wrapped Transitions. I think that's terrific. Well, that brought you up to date.

[end tape 2, side A]

[Interview # , September 15, 1994]
[begin tape #1, side A]

VIII MORE ON 1937-1938, AND RALPH

Cross Country Trip with Anny Kulka and Peter Bernheis

Bill: I know this seems a step backwards, but Bonnie, we don't know how you and Ralph met.

Bonnie: Did I tell you of my trip across the United States with Dr. Anny Kulka? The year I left Graham, 1937, in the spring, in June? I had been actually hired to teach at the University of Washington in their summer school so I had to leave the company in early June.

And Dr. [Ernest] Kulka's wife, a pediatrician and an allergy research person, had been hankering to go back to Austria, and that wasn't possible--she grew up in the Austrian Alps, or with that in her background. She and I were very good friends and she had a thirteen-year-old daughter, Madi, and she was dying to spend a vacation in something like the Alps. I kept saying, "You should come to the Cascades." So she decided to drive West with me.

I wrote to my mother and said, "Would you find them a cabin in the mountains." And Mother promptly found them a cabin since she had good friends, my father's close friend, Henry Suddreth, who ran the American Oyster House, a famous restaurant in Seattle--one of the early ones where the fish swam in the window, and you chose your trout or bass or whatever you wanted. And he had a man who sat outside and shucked fresh oysters so you always had fresh stuff there. He and my father were close, close friends and hunting pals. Mrs. Suddreth and Henry had a cabin up on Mt. Rainier, and they were able to find another cabin for rent for the summer, or a good part of the summer for Anny and Madi.

As we were about to leave--and I'm sure we had to go by bus to Detroit, or else we took the train, I don't remember which--a young man came from Germany via England to visit the Kulkas. His name was Peter Bernheis, and he had been the Jackie Coogan of Germany. That is a child actor. Jackie Coogan is so far before your time--or almost anybody's time except mine--that nobody knows who he is, but he was the most famous child actor.

[laughter] And he precedes Shirley Temple, I mean well before her.

Peter's mother was a very famous Reinhardt actress, working with Max Reinhardt in productions. His father was an air pilot and was killed in the First World War. And he was Jewish. Peter rebelled against his--because his mother was very flamboyant, and probably difficult, too, I don't know the entire history of it--but he rebelled as he became a teenager against being an actor or having anything to do with the theater. I think he was mad at his mother, mostly.

And he got a job--he trained actually as a metallurgist, and he got a job in someplace in Germany where they did a good deal of research on developing the quality of lining or the quality of the steel for pistons for airplanes that wouldn't corrode, you know, wouldn't play out, you know, mixing metals or something. I have no real knowledge of what it was. And he had been offered a job in England because of his knowledge of this kind of metallurgy and had gone to England.

But I remember his telling me how angered he was when he went to get his exit visa to go, to leave the country. The man who prepared these papers for people to leave looked at his history and said, "You don't have to leave. Your father was Jewish, but he was a hero in the First World War." And that infuriated Peter because he was being allowed, even as a Jew to stay, he would have been allowed. And he was so angry at what was happening to Jewish friends, even though he wasn't considered Jewish and had "in's." How long he was in England, I don't know. But he was then offered a job at Boeing's because they were very into building bigger and bigger war planes, essentially.

Peter, I think, had been a violinist, amongst other things, and he came to Ernst Kulka's, and they took him in because of friends' associations and so on. I must say that Ernst Kulka hated him--[laughter] which I didn't know until many years later, and it had something to do with the violin, I don't know what it was, but it was something to do with the violin, either a violin that didn't get returned or something.

- Anyway, they asked me if I would take Peter west because I was going to Seattle. I said sure. Peter was not very tall, he was hardly taller than I was, and he had a great deal of charm in many ways, but he also was a little pushy and a little bit opportunistic. There was something about that that rubbed me a

bit. But he was absolutely enchanted with the idea of seeing the United States, this was very exciting for him.

And we started the trip. And I think Anny was absolutely furious that Peter began to flirt--he was a great flirt anyway--and he kept absorbing a lot of my attention. And that wasn't, wasn't very happy for either Anny or the child.

Bill: But he was flirting with you?

Bonnie: He was flirting with me, yes.

I think because I was out of the yoke of the Graham situation, where Martha had really discouraged my having boyfriends--. The situation was discouraging in that I worked all day and then I taught until 7:30, and then we had rehearsal till 11:30. Well, boyfriends, even, need sleep. And it was quite discouraging for young men, and frequently if they called me and she answered the phone, she would tease so terribly, tease me, and meaning it in a kind of fun way, but it was pretty discouraging for the young men. Not that I was being surrounded by them. But there were a group of young ones that were quite fun for me.

I was feeling that I was ready for male--for a kind of liberation. And Peter decided he was going to become my boyfriend--I was less sure about this.

The trip was quite wonderful in that we--I can't even now remember all the places we went because I always tried to go different places each time I went across the country. Sometimes I had to duplicate--. I would have to find notes or something to remind me which pathway I took across the country.

The Reception in Seattle, and A First Appearance by Ralph

Bonnie: We arrived in Seattle, and my mother had taken a summerhouse that belonged to Mrs. Bruce Beck whose husband was the head of the Bon Marché. It was quite a wonderful house with a guest house or a small cottage south of Alki Point in Seattle. It took you about twenty minutes to go down a sort of hairpin drive through a forest to get to the house. And my mother loved it because the idiot wives of many of my father's friends were scared and wouldn't come, and Mother felt that was great because she found it very trying. [laughter]

And my mother was into, you know, cooking salmon by digging in the beach and lining a pit with rocks and then building a fire on it and then taking fire away and the hot rocks--you wrapped this salmon in seaweed the way the Indians had always done it, and then you covered it all with the hot rocks, with more hot rocks, and that's the way you cooked your salmon. And she gave some quite wonderful parties and so on.

Well, when I arrived with Peter--my mother's technique had always been to engulf any male that looked like they were getting interested in me. She was very beguiling, and she gave him the guest cottage. And he just fell in love with my family. He actually till his dying day--and he died some years ago--felt that my father was his surrogate father. And this just distanced me from him rather fast because he was so absorbed with the family.

So, I began teaching in the summer school, and the head of the department, whom I liked very much, was a kind of interesting woman named Mary Aid DeVries. Her husband, Louis DeVries, was the head of the romantic languages department at {?} and he was at the university, head of the department, a very charming man. And they lived in the summers on their boat, which was a motorboat, and it was parked in Lake Washington at a mooring at one of the yacht clubs, I think.

Mary was a very social sort of person and we got to know each other and she got interested--she had invited me a number of times onto their boat for a party or a trip or something like that. And then she met Peter, of course, at this time. And Peter was by this time pursuing me rather heavily and she thought he was a pain and not my style. And so she decided that she would give a party and invite the most eligible bachelors she could find around the university and introduce me to them [laughter] because I didn't really know anybody my age.

Bill: Had you known her before, by the way?

Bonnie: No, I hadn't really. I had taught there the summer before very briefly, I think only two weeks or something like that. That was a six-weeks thing, during which I sprained my ankle, which is unusual for me. The floor was slightly--it was a beautiful studio, but the floor was slightly uneven, and somehow or other I managed to get on that part of it. But I went to the clinic and, you know, bound it up, and I was able to manage with it.

Peter, however, in the week before this party in which I was to meet the eligible bachelors, had been with me on Mary's boat.

And coming off--I don't know why, but instead of walking the way you have to when you got off a boat with the piers and the ramps to the boats such that you always have to make real right angles--. He didn't. He sort of went on a curve and landed in the water, and I just saw him disappearing. [laughter] He was holding my suitcase, a small suitcase with my clothes and stuff in it above his head. That didn't get wet. He couldn't go very far because it wasn't that deep there.

But somehow or other he strained a ligament or did something and ended up in a cast. I don't think he broke his leg, but he had to be in a cast. And he felt very sorry for himself, and I got more and more trapped with this because I had to drive into Boeing on my way to the University. He didn't have a car and he couldn't drive anyway. And he needed a lot of attention, which was sort of demanding.

Well, he was invited this next week, but because of his leg he couldn't sit in the cabin, he had to sit out in the back where he could climb in easily enough. And I was taken forward to meet the eligible men, and they were two. One was Roger Loucks, professor of psychology, a very charming man who became a life-long friend. And Ralph Heidi.

Ralph Gundlach, who was also in psychology and a close friend of Roger's and had known Mary DeVries and Louis for some years was--at the moment that I met him, he was trying to prove to Louis that you could drink a drink standing on your head. Well, he wasn't standing on his head, he was hanging by his knees over the side of the boat with his head almost in the water and drinking a drink upside down. [laughter] They were a little bit two sheets to the wind by the time I got there.

And they got more sheets to the wind. Ralph gets very affectionate when he's drunk and he was sort of dancing around the boat you know like--and it made Roger go absolutely--. He came from a terribly tight Christian background. His brother was a minister, and he was a very uptight young man himself, and he kept saying to me, "He's really a very nice man when he's sober." [laughter] He was sort of apologizing for Ralph.

Well, Ralph managed to take my telephone number before we left, but he had never called because he lost it. Typical--Ralph's notes get lost. And I went off--. After I finished teaching I went to California, I drove. And I arrived in San Francisco to visit Mrs. Mack. Do you remember her?

Heidi: Charlotte?

Bonnie: Charlotte Mack. And Charlotte Mack was the most remarkable woman.

A California Vacation Trip, and Charlotte Mack's Art World

Bonnie: I went to California, to San Francisco, just for a little vacation. And I drove down--it was the first time I had driven alone from Seattle to San Francisco. It was a wonderful trip, I remember. I think it was part of the whole thing of leaving the Graham company and being my own self and beginning to feel that I did have an identity, which I was very confused about when I was in the Graham company. Not that I didn't have an independent personality, but the confidence of what I knew, what was mine to know, so to speak, was puzzling me.

The teaching at the summer school had been very successful. I must have had about fifty students, tremendously enthusiastic. And one of them was the daughter of Dean Lauer. Dean Lauer was ultimately to become a serious enemy of Ralph's, a really repulsive man, and I had an inkling that he was pretty repulsive too, early on, because his daughter was in my class.

She was a young woman of probably nineteen or twenty. She was in college at the University of Chicago. And she had met Marion Van Tuyl who was at the University of Chicago teaching dance there, and had absolutely fallen in love with the idea of being a dancer. She was really deeply attached to the idea and stimulated by Marion, who was a wonderful teacher and I think she may have actually worked with Marion for at least a year and possibly longer. But she had had to come to Seattle to visit her family, or spend the summer with her family.

Her father was enraged at the idea that she was not going to pursue mathematics. He utterly disapproved of the arts. And so she was--she astonished me because, as she was working in class, tears were running down her face. This was an early class. And I walked up to her and I said, "Are you in pain, or are you uncomfortable in some way?" She said no, that she wasn't, that she was upset. I said, "Well, if you want to sit down, do. But if you feel like it, just keep working and crying." And so she kept working and crying, periodically.

I got to know her a little bit because I was concerned, and I learned this dilemma she was in. Well, she ultimately--Marion Van Tuyl moved to Mills College shortly after that. And Eleanor actually followed her to Mills and studied with her, completed her degree, I guess, at Mills. She broke with her family in the

sense that they had to accept that she was going to be a dancer, and ultimately she became the head of the dance department at Mills College.

[end tape 1, side A]

[begin tape 1, side B]

Bonnie: I was really in a very happy state when I went south. And I so loved the whole drive south. I think there's a photograph of me somebody took at Benbow Inn, which was an absolutely wonderful place at that time. A kind of resort, an inn, really, and I stayed there. And the fact that it wasn't just an old motel which is what I was mostly used to, that I had enough money to spoil myself a little on this trip--.

Heidi: Not sleep on the side of the road?

Bonnie: Not sleep on the side of the road.

Then I spent time with Mrs. Mack. I had been in her apartment, I think, but this was the summer in which I stayed with her for probably a week or so.

Mrs. Mack was an extraordinary woman. She was married to--gosh, I can't remember his first name, Mr. [Adolph] Mack--who was a Jewish refugee kid in San Francisco who got a job--and I think this is not totally accurate because I think he first worked in one company, an oil company, I believe, and worked himself up from, you know, floor sweeper to vice president kind of thing. And then became the head of Imperial Oil Company.

He was a very canny man, a charming man, small. And she was tiny. And he had been married, and there are a flock of Macks--Gerstle Mack--very well-known names. The Mack family was really something in the Jewish community, which was a very powerful community in San Francisco. And his wife died, his first wife, and he was in his fifties when, following her death, he took a trip to Egypt.

Now Mrs. Mack, Charlotte Mack, was the aunt of a student of mine in New York, Charlotte Chandler. And I had met Mrs. Mack when I was touring. I think I said this in my story of touring with Graham, that Mrs. Mack came backstage at the San Francisco Opera House and was looking for me. And it was because of Charlotte, telling her that I was there, and we just became immediate friends. And I went to lunch at her house, but I didn't stay there, that time.

I was absolutely overwhelmed when I walked into her house. It was at 1800 Gough Street, which I visited many times later on--just up from Van Ness, really. And it looked out over San Francisco, it had a beautiful view from every window. But the house, the walls were papered in a kind of gunmetal--but not solid, it had some kind of texture to it--paper, a silverish paper. And she had on her walls, Picassos, Klee, Kandinsky, Jawlensky--she had everything that I had come to know in New York, but nobody had west of New York, practically.

Well, she had become a very good friend of Galka Scheyer. Galka Scheyer was a European woman, an artist herself--she was a teacher--or she was a teacher at that time in Alaska, but she had come to the West Coast. And I don't know her history although I think that her history has been recorded, that there have been articles about her because she was so amazing. She brought what was called the "Blue Four" to the West Coast. That is, paintings of Jawlensky, Paul Klee, Mondrian--I've forgotten exactly who the Blue Four were. [Klee, Kandinsky, Jawlensky, Feininger]

Mrs. Mack--well, I have to go backwards a bit to tell you how this all came about. Mrs. Mack was a French teacher and lived, I think, outside of Chicago someplace and taught French. She got bored with it and decided she wanted to go around the world, and somehow or other she met a very wealthy woman who was not very well and needed a companion and so she hired Charlotte Mack to go with her. Charlotte was already in her forties, and getting feisty in a funny way, and she went around the world.

Now, I have in London the books of the photographs and the postcards of that entire trip. Because when she was in her late eighties and she asked me what I wanted--and I would have loved to say "I want a painting," but I didn't have the courage--I said I'd love to have her photographs of her trip around the world. And they are very frayed, and I have them very well protected, and the terrible thing is she never told where any picture was. [laughter] It's a great problem to look at this, but they are quite wonderful, because what she didn't take herself she got postcards of every place they were

Well, when she got to Egypt they rode camels out to the Sphinx, and she met Mr. Mack on a camel! And they must have had dinner, etc., etc., and so on, and ultimately she married Mr. Mack and moved to San Francisco, and suddenly she was the mother of a huge clan of Mack adult children, and she loved them. Richard Branston, who married a good friend of mine, Louise

Branston, was part of it. It was an enormous family. I'm sure there's some documentation someplace on the Mack family

And they had moved to this apartment. Now Charlotte Mack was a very energetic person. She was the kind of person who, when she learned to drive a car, she figured that she ought to know how to repair a car. So she took a mechanics course. And she had to have a special seat, she was so tiny in the car, to see over the hood, you know.

She volunteered her time all the years that I knew her in the orthopedic hospital, working with children, reading to them, helping them through all kinds of trauma. She wasn't trained at all, but she adored children, hadn't had any of her own and just gave her time to the children so many days a week. And they adored her there because she had a real knack for relating to children and understanding their fears, etc., etc.--this was both pre- and post-operative.

She was also a very ardent Sierra Club member. When she first married Mr. Mack, they lived, apparently, in his house, and it was filled with Germanic, heavy furniture, Victorian sort of stuff and paintings--Mr. Mack used to say, "I like a painting so I could cut the wool off the sheep." [laughter].

Heidi: Realistic.

Bonnie: Realistic paintings. And she came back from the Sierra Club one time--. She just couldn't stand the house. And apparently this was the point at which she began to, you know, say what she wanted, and they moved. Mr. Mack adored her, and she was wonderful with him.

He must have been--if she was forty or forty-five, he must have been about seventy or something. He was quite a bit older. Maybe less, I don't know. And so they moved to this apartment. And then she met Galka Scheyer and she began to get into the whole thing of painting, and it was just very exciting for her. She just wanted the whole visual thing of living to change. And she got into contemporary furniture--she had some wonderful, very beautiful stuff designed. She began to help young artists financially, and she became very knowledgeable about painting. And that's the time I met her.

Well, the summer that I spent a week with her living in her apartment, I lived in a tiny bedroom, but it had a painting I absolutely adored which was a Paul Klee, and it was called "The Face of Winter." It was a painting that I loved because it was

one of his curious kind of little, thin figure faces, you know, thin-lined things, which he does almost like a cartoon. But he had used paint so well that "The Face of Winter's" nose was shining white. And it was like winter was expressed like the top of a mountain or something, with this very cold little nose. It was just charming, really wonderful.

Mrs. Mack, when I got married, gave me a Paul Klee which is called "In My Garden" which I have in London. And it's one of those marvelous things where you tilt it and you see into the painting--into the drawing actually, it's an etching. Anyway, our friendship began there, and I just had a marvelous time with her, I so enjoyed her.

Later my children, who got to know her, appointed her officially their grandmother. They didn't get to know her as well as she would have liked, or they, actually, because we weren't in the California more than summers. But I kept seeing her until she died, actually, and she must have been near ninety when she died.

Interesting things about her were that Mr. Mack, who was quite elderly, became quite ill and was homebound and so on. And she had been pushing her paintings on him, and he always complained about her paintings, but in a very jocular sort of way. He would take me to see things in his room, you know, where a fried egg was a fried egg, or the wool was really thick and so on. [laughter]

She had actually sort of redone his room and she had put some George Braques, which are still-lives, you know, and they were very modest sort of paintings compared to some of the other very lively and terribly bright things that she had. And when he was very sick, she thought, well gee, this isn't fair. If he really doesn't like those, I'm going to take them down. And she started to remove the Braque, and he hollered at her, he wanted that painting there. So she apparently had won him over, and she was quite delighted at telling me that story.

He died, and she decided move to Nob Hill, Green Street, I think, or very close to it. She had a wonderful apartment that looked right down on the Golden Gate bridge. And while she was in that apartment she suddenly realized that the apartment was all made of wood. The building was an older one, and it had an enormous amount of wood, and it was not fireproof at all. And she had these treasures and she thought, this isn't right.

She arranged--because she had an art dealer that she'd worked with in purchasing her paintings in New York--she got in touch with him and she had them sold, all her paintings. And then she began to totally support young San Francisco artists. She would buy their paintings, because they [the paintings] weren't that same kind of responsibility, and she was supporting the artists.

Also she gave a tremendous amount of money to the Rosenberg Foundation, I think it is, I'm not absolutely sure. There's a very big foundation, a Jewish foundation--they mainly support social services, medicine, some arts, I think. She gave a lot of her paintings to the San Francisco Art Museum, she was very close to the curators there. She had given paintings over years. And she was so knowledgeable. I remember she introduced me to that wonderful curator they had for many years, Grace--something.

Bill: Grace McCann Morley?

Bonnie: That's right, Grace McCann Morley. I met her. Occasionally now when I go to the museum, I see something that was from Mrs. Mack. So she was one of the delightful people that in my first year of independence I met and really treasured as a friend. And I would always either stay with her or see her when I was in San Francisco.

A Benefit Performance for the Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy

Bonnie: Anyway, I went back to Seattle and started teaching at the Cornish School, and I started living with Mary DeVries. During August while I was in San Francisco, Louis DeVries had an embolism. He was shaving, and suddenly he just dropped dead, and it was an incredible shock for Mary. It was a blood clot that just moved to the heart fast.

She was very distraught. She--I think she had had a house, and she moved into an apartment on the corner of 45th and 15th Avenue, right on the corner of the University of Washington. And she was so sort of fearful about being alone and so on, I said, "Why don't we share the apartment?" So I moved in with her. And it was fine for about three months, through Christmas, I think it worked pretty well.

But Mary was beginning to need more space for herself, and I was too. And finally Ralph called me up. I think--no.

Heidi: You got in touch with him because he had the house.

Bonnie: That was it. I think in October I was asked by somebody, I don't even remember who, if I would help the Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy--I don't think the Spanish refugee appeal had even yet been formed--to raise money for medical supplies to Spanish democracy. And I said certainly. And then the question was, how to do it. I'd never done anything like this before.

Bill: Why were you asked?

Bonnie: Why was I asked? I haven't a clue. [laughter] Somebody just decided that I might be able to do it, I guess. I haven't any idea who asked me, I haven't any idea.

Bill: Because of your political interests?

Bonnie: No, I wasn't very political at all, I really wasn't--you know, that's a good question. It never occurred to me. I just said yes, and that was it. Anyway, whoever the people were, and I really don't remember, they must have been university people or something like that because I didn't know many others.

Then I said, "Well, the problem is, where is this going to be done?" And somebody said, "Well, Ralph Heidi has a house, and I'm sure that he would loan his house." So I guess I called Ralph and asked if he'd loan his house, and he said, "Sure," he'd loan his house. And he'd also ask his neighbor so we could have two houses.

I told you about Ralph's house, which was built around a gorgeous tree, a big huge maple tree that Ralph didn't want to disturb. These were the houses I was to use for the party. Well, nobody had told me that Ralph was chairman of the Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy. When I called him up he was enthusiastic because he actually was very active with the committee.

The party was quite a success. I had Merce Cunningham, Dorothy Herrmann, and Syvilla Fort, my three most outstanding students in that first year, creatively speaking. The task I had set the kids in their choreography class that they were to create a dance study, a short dance that would use the space between the front curtain and the foot lights, what would have been footlights as you entered the stage.

[end tape 1, side B]

[begin tape 2, side A]

Bonnie: It was a challenge for them, number one, in thinking of what was appropriate to be done in front of such a curtain, and it had its references to vaudeville, etc., things that they could have seen in Seattle even, at that time. Because there was still the music hall and vaudeville type things that were coming into Seattle.

And Merce was a very delightful funny character. He really was interested in soft-shoe tap dancing. And so he chose a figure that was a little like--at that time there was a mascot for the Phillip Morris cigarette company, and it was the Phillip Morris boy.

Bill: Johnny?

Bonnie: Johnny, was that his name?

Bill: "Call for Phillip Morris."

Bonnie: Yes, isn't that funny? And so his character was like this, you know. And Syvilla did an absolutely comic piece on the Good Ship Lollipop, absolutely ridiculous piece, witty and funny. Dorothy Herrmann, the Canadian girl, decided to do a prostitute in a pool of light standing beside a telephone pole or a street lamp, under a street lamp, smoking a cigarette, a kind of suggestive, interesting kind of blues-y piece.

And I put these three together. I costumed them so there was a relationship in costuming, and I had Merce in--I think they were polka-dotted shorts and a funny little hat, kind of Phillip Morris hat, which was just a little flat thing, circular thing on the head. I do have pictures of him, actually, and they are really very amusing and very delightful.

Well, it was a very good little cabaret sort of thing, and I thought these pieces could be done in a very small space. So we used Ralph's house for the performance part, and then the food and everything was over in the other house. People just went between the two, and it was mild enough weather so they could.

A Benefit for the Spanish Refugee Appeal

Bonnie: The party was quite a success, and I began to know more people outside of dance, and between the University and other fields, as a result of that. But I also got to know Ralph, because we had to do all the cleaning up afterwards in his house. So we began to see each other and, to date. And by Christmas I had

decided that I couldn't stay with Mary DeVries any longer, partly because it was getting more awkward to see Ralph.

Mary was going up and down like a yo-yo emotionally, and she was a little bit wacky anyway. It was not something I thought I could sustain, taking care of Mary and her sundry boyfriends who were showing up. And they were all pretty strange, most of them were university people and had their own problems. I thought I better get out of that situation.

I went to live in a most amazing house, a very famous boardinghouse on Capitol Hill. And for the life of me, I cannot remember the name of the woman. It was something like Madame Plechette, Gwendolyn Plechette, I believe, if it's the same woman. [Note from transcriber: The house was designed and built by a well-known architect who also designed the house in Goldendale, Washington that currently houses an art museum--a few blocks west of the Seattle Art Museum off 10th East. She was a collector and devotee of decorative arts.]

She was Scandinavian, I believe, and had run this huge house which was slightly, you know, it wasn't in the greatest state of care. But she had converted it into a sort of bedroom-living room situation, and you could use the kitchen, which I never did. I can't remember using it very much. So there were all kinds of people living in it, and they were almost always artists. She had a great affiliation with the Cornish School. Many, many people that had taught at Cornish or studied at Cornish had lived in this house.

I had a wonderful big bedroom, a kind of living room-bedroom in the front of the house. And she and I got along very, very well. She was fascinated with the fact that I was at Cornish and so on.

Well, then I actually was dating Ralph quite a lot, I saw him a lot. And by May [1938] we had decided to run a big fundraiser for the Spanish Refugee Appeal. I actually have the program from that. We took over the Moore Theater. Mrs. Moore, a remarkable lady, tough as old boots, she actually gave us the theater free. But she couldn't account for the trade unions--the Stagehands Union and the Musicians Union, they had a grip on the theater.

And so I got the Jameses at the Repertory Playhouse to do a wonderful one-act play. I created a work called "Dance for Spain."

Heidi: It was a solo.

Bonnie: No, no. It was a group work. I did a solo in it. It was quite a long work. This was in the first year. Merce was in it--

Heidi: Were you dressed in red?

Bonnie: I--actually there was a section in which I represented the decadence of Spain, the Inquisition, this whole sort of history, in a sort of cardinal-like figure on a pile of boxes. We had a stage set, and it was made up of steps and boxes and things, and we reorganized them for different sections.

Heidi: Dad was so moved by that part, he would describe that.

Bonnie: Yes, it was a very arresting piece, and it ended with a dance of youth as a very positive thing, in a sense, celebrating the youth of Spain.

And I got the chorus at the University--Lawrence was the name of the man who headed it. Ralph had sung in the chorus many times. They had a Bach chorale and various different sections of it. And so he brought the whole chorus. Everybody was just marvelous, they pitched in.

And then I faced the hostility of the newspapers! I told you about the Seattle Catholic newspaper. I sent out to every newspaper the announcement of the concert and so on, publicity release for them to publish. The Catholic editor called me and asked me to be interviewed. When I went to meet him he kept telling me that I was clearly being manipulated, that I was getting Moscow gold--I mean every cliché you ever heard of.

This was my first encounter with political nastiness like this. I was absolutely infuriated. He was trying to pressure me, he was trying to frighten me, and if he did anything, it was to force me out of the Catholic church more firmly than I already was out of it. Because I was not a participating Catholic at this point. I hadn't officially left, and I hadn't been excommunicated, but in a sense you're automatically excommunicated when you don't take communion every year, at least once in a year. And I hadn't for all the years I was in the Graham company.

So the Seattle Times and other newspapers printed the wrong dates.

Bill: Deliberately?

Bonnie: They really were deliberately rotten. And the affair did not raise the amount of money that we hoped it would because people were confused. And we weren't also as hip on how to publicize something too. But it was a great evening, it was really a fine evening. And people didn't pull out, but I had to pay five musicians just to sit there. And I had to pay the Stagehands Union, and they were really so adamant. They didn't give a damn what went on, you know, those were the regulations.

So Ralph and I decided that we might as well get married after that, we were so embroiled in this whole thing. [laughter] But that was the beginning of my political education.

[end tape 2, side A, no side B]

[Interview 12, September 21, 1994]
[begin tape #1, side A]

IX MILLS COLLEGE, SUMMER 1938, AND MORE

Early Work with Children and Analysis of Movement

Bonnie: Recently there was a young woman here who has gone back to New York who was a student of mine at Reed College, now a psychotherapist, went through dance therapy and a whole lot of things. She spoke of something that startled me and reminded me--. We haven't gotten to that yet, but when I was teaching at Reed College she was in the first group of graduates from the High School of Performing Arts in New York, which was a very new thing, and she was one of the first group of students who came through as dancers.

I was able to offer a couple of scholarships at Reed College for a summer with me and various people that were teaching at Reed. I was sort of coordinating a special project in dance and drama at Reed for six weeks. And she was one of the group of dancers that I had work with children. I was teaching a class for people who were wanting to teach children, and the way I ran it was to have them observe classes and then have a seminar with me.

I decided that I would include some of the students that I had, the dance students, and that I would have them be assistants. I ran two parts of this every morning. One was for children--they were all between three and five years of age--one was to get children that were very shy and needed social sort of interaction before they could do group activities comfortably. I had them go into a squash court which I turned into an art studio--there were low tables, and all kinds of things were available for the children. And it was totally nondirected, so that the children came in and they could play with anything they wanted to.

But I had several students who were extremely sensitive--or I thought could be--to children, and I worked with them in preparing them. One of them was Remy Charlip, who has since written absolutely extraordinary books for children. He's doing the "Ludwig and Lu" for Oakland Ballet--he's a choreographer now, too. He became a dancer, he came out and worked with me. He'd never danced--he had just graduated from Cooper Union in New York, which is a marvelous arts-crafts school, public and free.

So these two or three kids that I had working with me, I made them do the same observation, that is, to write up observations of particular aspects of what children were doing in the classroom. So they might have to observe what I was teaching, or they might have to observe two children to see what the responses of those particular two children were. They really had to look at--. And then I moved them into a kind of analysis of what was going on.

Bill: A psychological analysis?

Bonnie: No, not a psychological analysis, more of an educational, organizational analysis: what was being taught, how were the children responding to it, what seemed to work for different children and didn't work for others. That is, in terms of how the children participated, what their range of interest was, and whether the children somehow or other felt inadequate and so they wouldn't participate.

I was asking them to make some judgments by that time, because they had been observing it quite a few weeks, as to what they thought were the hangups of the children, shyness or whatever it might be. But I hadn't remembered that I brought Ralph in, and that Ralph actually analyzed or discussed with each the students the papers they wrote and that his particular perceptions of what they had written and his talking with them was the turning point in her life to become a therapist.

You know, it was very interesting, she said, "He opened my eyes." Not that she did anything about it then, but he opened her eyes to the significance of an analytic process, and that's a psychoanalytic process. And that was before Ralph was an actual psychoanalyst, psychoanalytically oriented, too.

Bill: And what was the name of the person who was just visiting?

Bonnie: Roberta Shlasko. She was out here because her daughter is the manager of a marvelous new restaurant in Calistoga. She's been here about five years working, and restaurants is her area. And so she was up visiting her, and came to see me.

Two Films of Bonnie Demonstrating Graham Technique

Bill: Bonnie, we left off with your wedding and you and Ralph being married and the reporters pursuing you. What we wanted to do is move ahead to the war years.

Bonnie: Right. Well, it was the spring of 1938 that I got married. And I had to teach at Mills College that summer in '38 and Ralph had to teach at the University. And so I went south to teach. It was a short teaching session at Mills College, relatively short, four weeks, I think, or something.

But it was in that summer that I had students from quite a number of different places on the West Coast. And one of them was doing a master's degree in physical education at the University of Idaho in Moscow, Idaho. And she wanted to do it on the technique of Martha Graham. So she asked me if I would let her film me doing some of the key exercises. And I said sure, that I would do it.

She had a hand-held camera, sort of a home movie, black and white, 8-millimeter, and you had to wind it up on a spring and it only ran for twenty-five feet, so we had to do it out of doors. And the only place we could do it was on a sort of semi-circle stage at the back of building called the Mills College Greek Theater, which was a fragment of a Greek theater, I can tell you, it was so small. [laughs]

It was a cement semi-circle of stage, and it was ninety-two degrees. And in those years, we had no tights. Lycra and materials that stretched hadn't been developed. The only thing we did have that stretched was wool jersey, and we made our leotards ourselves out of wool jersey. So it was a difficult circumstance. I stood on a wet towel every time I finished anything--

Bill: To cool your feet off?

Bonnie: --to cool my feet off. But of course I also had to sit on the concrete. Anyway, the film was made, and it was a very short film, and she gave me a copy and I put it away. I didn't have an 8-millimeter projector, so I never looked at it.

I didn't look at it for, oh, it must have been twenty years or more. Then Ralph, who is the filmmaker in our family, suddenly decided to go through all the cans of stuff that we had. And he came on this little tiny can and opened it up and got anxious about the fact that it was liable to disintegrate because it was so old. I think it was marked so we knew.

Anyway he got a projector, and we looked at it, and I realized then that it was quite rare. Even though it looked like a Charlie Chaplin film, it sort of--every time she came to the end of twenty-five feet, I'd have to hold. And then she

didn't have a tripod, so she never was quite in the same place.
[laughs]

Ralph had it put onto new film so it was protected. And I didn't use it again until I guess maybe 1983 or '84, something like that, when they ran a big conference at Purchase. The New York State Department of Education had an arts section to it for universities that dealt with culture and the universities. I can't remember the precise title, but Patsy Kerr {?} was the head of it. And she had organized it so that the dancers who had been in the original companies of Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, Hanya Holm, and Martha Graham gave workshops and sat on panels.

It was a very interesting conference, a very salutary one in many ways for a particular generation of young dancers who did come to learn something of the history of the artists whose work they were involved in. I was asked if I would teach an early Graham class because they knew that I had been her assistant. I was living in England, and I got this invitation, and I decided that I would like to do it.

In the meantime, I had heard that Ron Protas had become the controller--and still is today--of all of Graham's work and was the sort of administrative director at that time of the Graham company. Graham was still alive, but she was not participating in this conference, she didn't come. But he was threatening anybody who did early Graham work because he was trying to license Graham work and was trying to set up a codification and a system for training teachers, and then you had to get a license.

So I went to Graham and said--not to Graham, to Marion North--and said, "I would like to do this conference, I will be in the States, but there is a possibility that I may be sued. What is your attitude about this, because the institution might be sued too."

She said, "Let them sue." Because it's absolutely ridiculous, it's about like trying to patent the relativity theory of Einstein. So I went ahead and did this lecture and workshop. I preceded it by showing the film--even though it was comic in some ways because it was not edited at all--and the students were absolutely rapt. And then I taught a class based on that material.

Bill: At the conference?

Bonnie: At the conference. And John Mueller, I believe his field is sociology, who is a teacher, has been a professor at Rochester, at the university, John had a passion for dance, although it wasn't his field. He had developed a dance history course that he taught, and he did it almost entirely with films because he couldn't afford to bring dancers there very often. As a result, he had become a real film archivist, and he set up the dance films archives at Rochester.

John was a generous man who made these things available for rental or for sale, anything that he got. And he has actually developed quite an extraordinary archive. So he saw the film and said that he would love to bring it up to modern standards, 16-millimeter, and to have me add some written dialogue--written information for the film. And that it would be rented or released. So I agreed.

I agreed, in part, because I was so cross with the Protas attitude that was making Martha Graham's work absolutely secretive, really, and no one could get hold of any early material or any early information, anything at all. Also I had plenty of indications from things that I had heard that he was attempting to literally sell this whole thing as a great big--he tried to get UCLA to be the harbor for all of Graham work, which would mean that--. At that time, many universities were paying a lot of money for the work of a writer.

Bill: To acquire their manuscripts?

Bonnie: To acquire manuscripts, etc. I think he was attempting to do something like that, that he would still be governing, in a way. I felt that this was just wrong, to be so close. I didn't oppose the idea of the archives at all. So I never discussed it with him, didn't feel I had to, the film was of me and so on. And the film is available today.

Bill: Through Rochester?

Bonnie: Through Rochester. I get the munificent sum of \$4.75 a year, you know, which indicates it isn't rented that often, or sold. [laughs] I've written--of course, he's a terrible writer--I've written and said, "How many have you actually rented and how many have you actually sold, any at all?" But I do hear that people use it, and a few places have bought it.

Bill: I remember you were in Berkeley one Christmas about eight years ago, is that the film you had with you?

Bonnie: Yes, I have a couple of copies.

The other thing that did happen which was really very nice was that I discovered that there was a film of me in the dance collection in New York that had been done by Betty Lou Thompson, who was a dance teacher in the Physical Education Department at the University of Oregon in Corvallis. I think it was a teachers' college actually, not the University of Oregon, but it was a teachers' college in Corvallis. Probably has another title now because teachers colleges' names got dropped.

She had come the following year in 1939 to Mills College when the Bennington School of Dance moved to Mills College for that one summer. And Martha Graham was there, and Doris and Charles, and I think those were the two major companies that were there. And she asked me to do more complex--not the thematic material, but "combinations," as they are called, of Graham work, the more advanced level of work. And she had 16-millimeter color film, good equipment. So this footage existed at the library.

I wrote to her--she was in her eighties at that time, had been retired for a long time--and she gave the release so we could get hold of that footage. And we added it to the black-and-white that we had and it makes about a fifteen or twenty-minute film, which has proven to be very useful because there's so little documentation of Graham's work in the '30s because we never had enough money to afford photographers or anything like that.

Bill: Were there students in the class at Mills who you still see today or who have gone on in dance, as far as you can remember?

Bonnie: You know, there were one or two that I kept in touch with for a period of time. Some of them came to work with me at Reed, I think, once. But not really, not that I can recall from that particular group. Most of them were students in dance classes in PE departments around the Bay Area, places like that.

Lester Horton at Mills

Bill: Was it a time when you got to know other dancers, other choreographers?

Bonnie: That was true in that summer, yes, that's true. Because in 1938 Lester Horton was at Mills, and he was creating a work--I've forgotten the title of it, but its base was Mexican events. And I think actually that Merce and one other of the dancers went to Mills that summer also and were taken by him into this production.

Bill: Merce had been a student of yours prior to that at Washington?

Bonnie: Yes, and that summer I think he went to Mills. I've got to get some documentation on this, because I don't remember it very clearly. I've been recently hearing that Merce was there and that he danced with Lester and I now know how I could get hold of a program note or something like that, which I didn't know for a long time.

I've actually seen film of that work just recently. And a film that Leo Goldoni has made of Lester Horton. That's when I got to know Lester, was that summer. He was an extraordinary artist, actually. He was a man who could do everything. He made the costumes, he designed, his crafts knowledge was incredible. He taught, and he was a choreographer.

I had met him in 1936, I think it was. I've already talked about that, when he told all the dancers they shouldn't study with me. I had been brought to Los Angeles to teach Graham work at the Norma Gould studio, and I had almost no students and this was because there was a ban from Lester on my teaching. I went immediately to see who this was that was causing the problem, and liked them very much.

And I got to know Bella Lewitsky at that time, who was a leading dancer for him and the person who really developed his technique. Because he was scatty as an educator, so to speak, in developing, sequentially developing the technique. And Bella really did the job, and developing it further utilizing his ideas and developing things from there.

All the sort of hostility--if there had been any hostility or suspicion or whatever it was--that had marked that 1936 time disappeared when we got to know each other at Mills College two years later. And I was enormously impressed with the work that he was doing. It had a kind of different quality than what was going on in New York. There was a sort of epic aspect to what he did. His productions had a kind of grand quality to them and a sort of big scope.

I don't know whether this is a result of being in Hollywood so that he had that influence from the documentary epics, you know, "Birth of a Nation" and that kind of thing, but there was a kind of sweeping quality to this particular production and parts of it can be seen on this film that exists of it. He had a wonderful sense of humor, too, so that he was fun to be with or to talk with.

I remember this as a sort of a tiny thing. I arrived at Mills--he had already been there for a week or two weeks and I think I had taught at the university [of Washington] just before I came down--and there was nobody around. I arrived on a Sunday, and I found where I was to stay, and I wandered over to the theater.

It was Sunday evening. I went onto the stage, and I heard sounds downstairs--and I knew there was a costume room downstairs--and I went down the stairs, and I could hear this singing going on. Somebody was there. And as I got closer, I heard the song. It was, "Just call me Pee-Pee, 'cause I'm Your'n." [urine] [laughter]

Bill: This was Lester?

Bonnie: This was Lester Horton making up a new song. And he was busily making costumes by himself and amusing himself. So that was my second introduction to Lester. And we had an amusing evening in the theater.

Bill: Did you ever collaborate with him?

Bonnie: No, I didn't, because he was on the-- he was on the West Coast, but I was in Washington and there was just no chance, we couldn't travel at all.

Bill: Who else was on the faculty at Mills?

Bonnie: Well, Marion Van Tuyl was then the head of the dance department.

Bill: Yes.

Bonnie: Well, as a matter of fact, I don't think that's true. I believe it was Tina Flade who was the head of the department and who actually brought me out in '37 as well as '38. I was at Mills twice and the first summer Lester wasn't there. The second summer, he was.

Then Marion Van Tuyl came as the head of the department, and she really developed that department over the next twenty years or more.

[end tape 1, side A]
[begin tape 1, side B]

A Honeymoon, and Thoughts on the Influence of Mexico on Graham

Bonnie: Following the end of that summer Ralph came down. He finished teaching at Washington, and he joined me, and we decided we would have a honeymoon. Our honeymoon was to go to Gallup to the tribal festival, Indian festival, that they held each year, the Indian dances. And so we drove to Gallup.

It was a wonderful and exciting experience for me to be in the Southwest. I'd never been there before. Also my interest had been quickened because Graham had received the first Guggenheim to be given to any dancer, in 1931. She wanted to study American Indian dance in the Southwest. She wanted to attend as much of the festivals as possible.

The interesting thing was that the Guggenheim--I've since seen copies of letters Martha wrote, or I may even have them. The Guggenheim doesn't give money to do things in the United States, it's all about going abroad. The point of it was to broaden students' knowledge, and they would give it to her to go to Mexico. And so in 1931, I believe it was, she actually took the Morro Castle.

She and Louie Horst went to Mexico. And they visited the sites. There weren't a lot of festivals for her to see, or Indian dancing, because that would have been extremely remote--they were the Yaquis or some remote group. But she visited the temples and the various archeological sites in and around Mexico. I don't think she got to Yucatan or any place like that. And that was enormously stimulating.

Then she had to write to Mrs. Elmhirst--and that's a letter which I believe I have a copy of--she wrote to Mrs. Elmhirst asking her for a gift, literally a thousand dollars I think, for her to go to the Indian country. So she came back and with Louis went to the Southwest, to Santa Fe. And she met D.H. Lawrence and his wife and quite a number of artists in that area who were marvelous to her, very helpful, and became very good friends of hers.

Because they were very knowledgeable about the dances they got her to the Indian reservations, and she saw a great many dances.

Bill: Did that influence her work?

Bonnie: Very much, very much. Profoundly, in fact. Because she had such a deep respect for the integrity of the Indian tribes in

terms of their culture, in terms of their continuing to live the rituals and their own history, in a sense, through dance, through their carvings, through every manifestation, the way they did their rugs and so on.

She was, I remember, so impressed with the fact that when an Indian weaves a rug they always leave one flaw in it, because that's the way the spirits can get in. If it's too perfect it leaves out the humanness, the fact of a spirit moving in and out.

She was so interested in economy of movement at that time, too. She was trying to cut away romanticism, sentimentality, a whole lot of things like that. And to try to find in movement what was the most economical way in which one can communicate human emotions through the body. And so the very economy of the forms, the attitude, etc., was manifest in many different ways to her.

One story I remember her telling--and I tell it on a film actually that's just been done--was that she was watching a sunset from a pueblo, and standing behind her was an Indian man that she knew. This was an absolutely gorgeous sunset and she said to him in some awe, "What a beautiful sunset." And he didn't say anything, and then he said, "It is a sunset."

And Graham was struck by this because, again, it was an evidence for her of that extraordinary--. Sunsets are by their nature beautiful, you don't need the word "beautiful" in it, it's a sunset. That was very profound for her, you know, it was just one more little part of that mosaic of information {} that she got from them.

Bill: Did she talk about that experience?

Bonnie: It became very important to her. She tried to go every summer to spend some time in the Southwest, whether it was resting or going to the dances and so on. It was part also, I think, of her very profound sense of the country, the vastness of the United States. The influence was very great.

It was after 1931 that she did "Primitive Mysteries," after she had been to the Southwest. And it's one of the great dances that she did. Many of the things she did in the early '30s were very influenced by what she saw and what she felt about the Southwest and about the Indian culture.

She also made a very interesting remark, later, because she was interested in two profound influences in American culture

that were indigenous. And one was the culture of the Indians, and the other was the culture of the Blacks, who were brought as slaves here, and yet had developed a culture also within the confinements of the plantations where they worked. She was interested in their dance, how that was manifest.

She thought that the Indians--their rhythms, organization, were rhythms of integration, that they were integrating with all the natural things around them, they sought to identify with nature. And that the rhythms of the Blacks' dances were rhythms of disintegration, off-beat, complex, jazzy kinds of rhythms. And these, she felt, came from the fact that they were reflecting the desire to escape, desire to return home or to escape from the confinements in which they lived.

Bill: That's an interesting hypothesis.

Bonnie: The rhythms of the Indians are extraordinarily, you know, repetitive and subtle. They do change, but they are very subtle. And the jazz rhythms that basically came from the Black population are complex, off-beat, counterpoint, you know, quite amazingly different. And escapist in a funny sense, you know.

Part of it is the blues is an expression of a wish to be in some other state, whether it's a reflection of the sadness or the sorrow or the tragedy of their existence in many ways. So.

Bill: The summer of '38 was the first chance you had to see live Indian dancing?

Bonnie: Yes, absolutely, in its native situation. So that was a terrific experience. And then Ralph and I--Martha had asked us to come and stay with her in Santa Barbara. Now I'm wondering if it was '38 or '39. I'm a little mixed up on that. I think it must have been '39 that I went to Gallup.

Bill: End of the second summer of teaching?

Bonnie: End of the second summer. I think it was '39 we must have gone, not '38. Because I seem to remember that our honeymoon was delayed by a year. Oof, I'm really confused, I'm not quite sure of the dates.

Bill: Well, we will get it all straightened out.

Ralph's Support of Bonnie's Career

Bill: Before you and Ralph got married did you have a lot of discussion about what the future would hold, that you would be going off? Did you both have developed professional lives of your own when you came together?

Bonnie: Well, I made it very clear to Ralph that dance was the thing that preoccupied me. I don't remember our having any profound discussions or my saying, "Look, if you're going to marry me, you're going to have to understand this." It wasn't that kind of an approach at all. Ralph was absolutely in support of my having a career.

He felt, actually, that the breakup with his first wife, Alice, who was a very bright woman, a philosophy major, if I remember correctly, at the University of Washington--. As soon as she married Ralph, she couldn't teach, and she had a teaching assistantship, because of nepotism rules. This was an enormous frustration to her. She did some teaching at Reed, but it was very hard for a woman to get a job who was married to a university professor.

Ralph felt that her frustration over not being able to have a significant career--. My feeling was that she had a child pretty much because that's what you ought to do, that she really wasn't terribly interested in raising children, and she never had another child even when she married Roy Kennedy later. And so Ralph was sensitive to this and felt it was just wrong.

Bill: It was also true that his mother's career was stymied?

Bonnie: His mother--well, she hadn't had a real career, she had been prepared to have a career and then married, and there was no chance for having a career from then on.

And of course my family, my mother was very strong for women having an independent career. It was clear that you had a career, but you also had to run a family, you had to juggle. To make anything work you had to do both, or three things, you know. For me, that was something I accepted.

But we didn't intend to have children right away, and it was just as well because-of the whole Canwell sort of thing. It would have been really even more traumatic than it was.

Bill: Did you anticipate the separations, that you would be going to teach at Mills and he would be staying?

Bonnie: Well, it happened immediately, I mean it was already there before we married. I had a contract and I had to do that. And I anticipated that Ralph--. He took jobs in different universities in the summertime, and sometimes I went with him and sometimes I didn't. Or sometimes I went someplace and he went someplace else.

I think actually it might have been that summer of 1938-- I'll have to look it up--that he had a contract to teach at the University of British Columbia. And after I finished I came up and went to stay with him in Victoria--in Vancouver. And then it was the next summer that we went to visit Martha.

I was invited to teach at the Helen Bush School in the year following our marriage, so that was '38-39. And that was the first year that John Cage came to work with me. The two of us taught in this school where Ralph's daughter, Joan, was going to school. It was a private school very near our house.

Nellie Cornish and the Board of Cornish School

Bill: John Cage came to Cornish?

Bonnie: John Cage came to Cornish. I think I need to be sure we have talked about Cornish, at this time that I was back teaching. The first year that I was at Cornish, Miss Cornish stayed on. She was very mad at the board, very frustrated with the board--.

The Cornish school had been supported over many years by contributions of money from mainly wealthy women whose husbands were big shots in the town. But the board began to get nervous, even though they had come through the Depression, and they wanted to have more businessmen on the board. Then when the businessmen came on the board they began to say the school had to pay for itself.

Miss Cornish absolutely said the arts will never pay for themselves, they can't be expected to. A portion of it, yes. And she was really running the school so there were hundreds of children taking classes every afternoon at the school. The classes were full. I'm sure there were a lot of scholarships for people that couldn't afford it. But there was a whole post-graduate--that is post-high school, four-year course going on all the time, and evening classes. The place was absolutely humming all the time.

Miss Cornish was so frustrated that she wanted to leave. But she said to me, "I've just brought you out here, and I'm not

going to leave this year." But at the end of the year she did resign, and she left Seattle.

I had already discovered, in the first year that I was there, that they had done very little publicity for me as a new faculty member, they had done very little publicity that I was the first accredited teacher, so to speak, of Graham work on the West Coast. They had done nothing, they were so unimaginative.

And so at the end of that first year I set up a whole series of things that needed to be done to forward dance. When I came back in the fall, they hadn't done a thing at all.

Bill: And whose responsibility was that?

Bonnie: Well, it was a woman who replaced Aunt Nellie [Cornish]. I have interesting letters--not here--about that, the kinds of things that I said, the things I wrote to the board, I was amazed to discover them.

Bill: Was Miss Cornish good at publicizing?

Bonnie: Yes, she was excellent.

Bill: So when she left, nobody--

Bonnie: --it was really going down the drain.

They also had reneged a bit--. Before I came it wasn't very widely publicized and Aunt Nellie was upset about that. I have a lot of correspondence with Aunt Nellie about it because I wrote to her--. She went to Los Angeles to live near an adopted daughter, who was an actress, and I wrote to her. And I have her letters back to me saying what a pain the board was and so on, very interesting stuff.

Bill: Did she live long after she left?

Bonnie: Oh, yes. Her life is extraordinary. There is a book on that, called Miss Aunt Nellie, which I have in London.

Ralph Gilbert

Bonnie: Anyway, the next two years were something of a battle with the school to pay more attention to what they had in the dance department. The first year my accompanist was a man named Ralph Gilbert who had been an accompanist at the school with Welland

Lathrop. And Welland Lathrop was the man that I was replacing as head of the dance department.

Ralph had a wall-eye, and he wasn't a beauty--I mean, to look at he wasn't a gorgeously handsome man. He was a tall, very able man. But this eye, which was a muscular problem, had never been attended to. And that year, with some encouragement, he had the eye corrected, and it made such a difference in his personality.

I think he actually hadn't confronted an awful lot of things in his own life. And he just went through a total change and decided he would go to New York and be an accompanist in New York. I wrote to Martha Graham and said, "Take this man, he's incredible." And she did, and he stayed in New York. I don't know if he's still alive, but he married a dancer and his life totally changed because of that operation.

We had a very strange thing happen. Money was stolen from my office--I had a little tiny office in that year--and I was very disturbed about this. I had an impression that actually it was Ralph Gilbert that had stolen the money because he sat at the piano, he was very near the office, and so on and so forth.

I discussed this with Ralph, and lie detector tests were first being used, these--

Bill: Polygraphs?

Bonnie: The polygraphs, you know, where you're asked questions and so on, and you reveal, give yourself away. And so we decided that we should use this technique. In hindsight I think it was absolutely stupid, it created more problems. It also created a lot of fascination. But the implication of anybody taking such a test is that they might be the person who did it, you know.

Well, the evidence from the lie detector test was pretty clear that it probably was Ralph. He agreed to take it, you know, everybody agreed to take it. I don't know how I hoodwinked the kids into doing it, I haven't the faintest idea. I think it was a really dumb thing to do, but I think I got sort of wound up and fascinated with the fact that you could do it.

Bill: The technology?

Bonnie: Yeah, the technology sort of thing. Anyway, it was a bit of a diversion, and I think it was a very hard thing for Ralph Gilbert to go through. But we never ceased to be friends, even

so. I would see him in New York and so on. The whole thing got kind of forgotten.

Bill: And the mystery never got solved?

Bonnie: We never did anything with the information at all. And I began to realize this was dumb, dumb, dumb.

[end tape 1, side B]

[Interview 13, October 2, 1994]
 [begin tape 1, side A]
 [Bonnie and Bill: Also present Heidi Gundlach, Peter Smith,
 Emily Rose Smith]

X JOHN CAGE, AND THE PREPARED PIANO

"America was Promises," 1939-1940

Bonnie: The last year that I was at the Cornish School was '39-'40 and that was the second year that John Cage was with me, and it was the year that Merce Cunningham had gone into the Graham company. All my other students were still with me. They were taking what was a four-year course, and most of them were in their second year, or beginning of their third year.

During that year, John and I actually managed to do quite a number of things. I was choreographing a good deal more, and I had decided that I was going to start a project to get young people into dance.

By this time I was really very upset with the Cornish School not carrying through with publicity and advertising and support, and I was having some really tough times with the directors. I decided I would do something that would bring young people into the Cornish School as students and I lit on the idea of establishing what I call the American Dance Theater. It was a junior version, however, of it, a sort of testing thing.

I had read the poem of Archibald McLeish called "America Was Promises." I was very--I can't remember why I was as, I guess politically aware, in a sense, to the fact that culture in America was being stamped on in so many ways. His poem, "America Was Promises" deals with the fact that people came to the U.S. from Europe, and they brought their culture with them, and we worshiped that culture, whatever it was.

It affected how our houses were built, what kind of furniture people put in, what kind of possessions they had--their attitudes were very, very European. And yet America was full of promise for new things, new ideas. And this touched me very much because of the fact that what I was doing in Seattle was, in a miniature way, pioneering a new approach to dance and I had gotten pretty passionate about it, and also highly frustrated.

During that year I also helped to found the Seattle Artists League with Robert Eigelhart {?}, who was at the University of

Washington in the art department, and with George McKay, a composer--quite a few people. We started this to support artists in concerts and in art gallery presentations, etc. We all were hardworking, and we didn't have an awful lot of time to put in it, so we didn't do massive things. But over a couple of years we actually did present Syvilla Fort in her first concert after she had graduated, and a number of things.

Bill: Who was she, Bonnie?

Bonnie: She was a student of mine when I came to the Cornish School, she was the only black student I had. She had graduated from the University of Washington, I think, already and was doing her training at Cornish School. And she was just about to complete her studies in the first year that John was there.

I'm not sure whether--it must have been the second year, it wasn't this year that she did her concert. I'll check that.

Bill: And the Seattle Artists' League supported her?

Bonnie: Well, that was later, that she did her first concert. I think that was probably in the fall of 1940 that she did her first concert supported by it--because she was already out of the Cornish School when she did that. But she had to do a graduation concert at the Cornish School. Her job was to make an entire concert.

Did I go through this before, about how the "Prepared Piano" of John Cage's got developed?

Bill: No.

Bonnie: Oh, well, I'll do that now, then.

Bonnie: Syvilla had to, in order to graduate, be responsible for an entire concert. And she could use dancers in the school, or if she wanted, dancers from outside the school. She had to be responsible for the costume designing, the sets, and so on. But she could call on anybody she wanted--so long as she could pay for it. [laughs] So everybody did everything for nothing.

There was only one dictate with respect to music, that I had to discuss what she chose in the way of music with John and with her. And John would write two pieces, at least, for her, so he would compose pieces for her. And then she had to use recordings.

We didn't even have tape at that time, so you had to use actual recordings.

Bill: On disks?

Bonnie: Yes. And we had fairly good equipment to do that with at the Cornish School. In the theater, not in the studio.

So she created a beautiful piece called "Bacchanal." And interestingly enough, Syvilla had been raised in the white world very much, not as much in the black world, because her mother was the housekeeper for Miss Cornish and so she'd had a lot of opportunities for study, etc. Her father, I think, was a postal worker, and she had a brother--I'm not sure what her father did, but I think he had died and the mother was a widow and so she was raising these two children by working as a housekeeper. She was a lovely woman, really wonderful woman.

"Marriage at the Eiffel Tower"

Bonnie: John came to me after looking at Syvilla's dance and said, "I have to have a gamelon." Now, that's when I was doing "The Marriage at the Eiffel Tower." I don't know that I've even talked about that.

Bill: I don't think so.

Bonnie: No? Well, "The Marriage at the Eiffel Tower" was a ballet, the libretto of which was written by Jean Cocteau in the early 1920's. And it's a spoof, a satire, really, poking fun at conventional attitudes in France.

What he {Cage, or Cocteau?} did was to take the most conventional ritual of middle class society in France, which was the wedding breakfast, and place it on the Eiffel Tower, which is the most conventional thing to do when you're visiting Paris. And then to spoof, in a series of little episodes, art dealers, religious people, highly decorated generals who make pompous speeches--that sort of thing.

John showed me the script, and I was really thrilled with it, and we decided to do it. The interesting thing about it was that--John wanted to write the music, and then he said, "But look, it says that it should be a pastiche, that it's not to be serious." And everybody worked on this. It actually had been produced by Jean Barlin {?}, a Swedish choreographer in Paris in 1917, or whenever it was done.

And so John said, "Well, I'll write some things." I think we'd started in the summer before to talk about this. "And let's ask Henry Cowell, and George McKay, and Bill Cummings {?}, a young composer in Seattle, to write pieces, different pieces."

Well, it happened that Henry Cowell was in San Quentin, having been stuck in there on a charge of molesting a young boy in California. And by the way, Henry Cowell was a real California product, and was one of Terman's children--

Bill: Gifted children?

Bonnie: Gifted children. His I.Q. was about the highest on the Terman scale. So he wasn't a stupid man at all, and he was already a well-known composer. But he got plunked into San Quentin.

So John and I went to San Quentin to visit him. And he was working in the jute factory--I think they did burlap bags or something like that. Eventually, I think, they stuck him in the library, because he was smarter. He was a tiny man. And he came bustling out to meet us, delighted to have John and me come to visit him. And we talked about his writing music, and he said oh, he would love to do it.

So we developed what we eventually called "music by portfolio," because he wrote--I told him the pieces that I would like him to write, and actually what he did was to write the opening and the closing, the train music. (I've since found the program, so I know exactly what he wrote.) He sent us, then, about twenty little themes by mail with a San Quentin stamp and the whole thing [laughter]. It must have been very puzzling for the guys that read it.

Heidi: Wondering if it's code?

Bonnie: Yes, wondering if it's code. So John, then, would play on piano the themes, and then we would select one--or two or three--that we thought were really close to what we wanted and send it back. And then he'd write another section, you know, and send it off to us. Two or three times we had this, because he was very fast, and he wrote music this way, and it was played on the piano, because we didn't have anything else.

John wrote the speech for the General, and I cast Merce as the General. The General is eaten by a lion after a very zealous speech, and the gimmick that Cocteau used for this was to have a photographer because the other thing about the clichés of weddings, etc., is the photographer.

The photographer has a camera--Bobbie Shlasko was the photographer the time I did it at Reed--and the photographer starts to take a picture, and then something comes out of the camera. [laughter] Sometimes it's a lion and sometimes it's a Trouville bathing beauty, which was the way of poking fun at all the fashions about bathing and bathing beauties and stuff.

Merce was cast as the General. The whole speech is done, of course, in movement, but with all the kind of pomposity and so on. And he was wonderful, really, very funny. Syvilla Fort was an ostrich and she was a Trouville bathing beauty. They all played many parts.

Preparing the Piano

Bonnie: But the whole thing about this in relationship to the "Prepared Piano"--it was '39 that Syvilla was doing her graduation concert--was that I wanted--. In the script it says, "and telegrams fluttered to the floor from the Eiffel Tower." I thought, well, we can't have any telegrams fluttering to the floor. We didn't have a proper space above for anybody to be up there, for one thing.

I decided--we did have a crosswalk up above the proscenium arch so I could get some dancers up there. I decided I wanted to have the telegram be a person and to arrive by sliding down a brass pole. So with that in mind I went to the fire department near us and talked to the firemen and asked them where they got their practice poles. And they welcomed me to slide down a pole and see how it was. [laughter]

They told me that they got them from a certain foundry. And I went to the foundry, and the foundry[men] were very nice. But I was totally frustrated because even in those days brass, because it was solid brass, cost \$5 a foot. My entire budget was \$50! And so this was out because I needed, you know, fifteen feet of it anyway.

So I carried this piece back with me to teach a class--I'd gone out between classes--and John was to play for the class. It was a technique class. (I started the day with a technique class and ended it with a technique class, for the kids, so they had two technique classes a day.) I came in, and went up to the piano, and we had a big old grand that was on its last legs, I mean literally on its last legs. Its hinges were falling off it, everything was falling off it. But it still made fairly decent sound.

And I had a box on a table behind the piano where I kept music, but also a box filled with the things that fell off in the studio--you know, the bars would come out of the wall and screws would fall on the floor. So I'd just pick them up and stick them there until we could do something about it.

Well, I handed John this piece of metal and said--. Oh, and John, I must tell you, had come to me just before this and said, "I need a gamelon orchestra." I said he was crazy, we couldn't afford a gong, let alone a gamelon orchestra. And I hardly knew what a gamelon orchestra was, but I had a visual picture of all the gongs and stuff. And where do you ever get them, anyway?

I said, "It's just not possible, we'll have to solve it some other way." So I gave him this piece of metal and said, "I can't have my pole, and you can't have your gamelon. But have this." I gave it to him, and he put it up on the tray that holds the music, and we started class.

But it was a wobbly tray, and the first chord that he struck it fell off and rolled up the piano. Well, John was enchanted. It was making quarter notes and half notes and wonderful sounds. And I lost him, right then and there. [laughter] I finally said to the kids, "We'll go on, we'll just let him go." Because he wasn't paying any attention to us, he was rolling this thing up and down and finding out what it could do.

And then he turned around and began to take screws and things and fit them into the piano and see what sound they made, and things bouncing on piano, strings and so on. By the end of class--I had taught the class without any music except this noise in the background--John had a solution. And then I said, "But John, you know, we don't have a grand in the theater, we only have an upright."

He looked sort of blank for a minute. And he said, "Well, I'll figure something." He went home, and he took pie plates and cut them up and stuff and began fitting them, because he had an upright at home that he worked on. He began to adjust it for an upright, with paper and screws and all kinds of--pie plates he had at home. And that's how the "Prepared Piano" developed.

I think there had been some precedent in the back of his mind, where people had played--. Henry Cowell was famous for what was called "clusters," where you used your fist on a group of keys, or you used your whole arm and played up and down, you know, on keys, making noise.

John Cage's Percussion Concert, and Morris Graves' Appearance

Bonnie: Have I told you of the concert that John gave with Morris Graves? I haven't done that? I'm now totally confused what I've said. It must have been in the very first year that John was with me that John and I decided that the Cornish School was pretty traditional. The music department was always very square. There wasn't a lot of contemporary music being thought of or listened to in the music department. They were wonderful musicians and great teachers but the fare, artistically, was very, very classic.

The Cornish School had run, for many, many years, a Friday night series. Miss Cornish had started this. And Mrs. Bruce Beck, who was the wife of the head of the Bon Marché in Seattle, she was a harpist and very capable in French and she'd been to Europe--. She came out of a sort of a tony family background, and she ran the only salon that Seattle boasted--she had a pretty house on Capitol Hill and she would have soirees, a concert, and entertained. Always very intellectual sort of people, artists and so on. She loved playing this role.

Mrs. Beck--her three or four children, most of them were dragged into the arts by her. Some of it stuck, and some of it didn't--her daughter, I think, is a farmer in Wales and has been for some years. [laughter] One son, Bruce, was just about the right age to work, take some classes with me, and he stayed in the arts and became quite a good writer. He was a pretty dilettante-ish young man but I was very fond of him because he had a great sense of humor.

Mrs. Beck ran this concert series, and they had wonderful people that came to Seattle, or were visiting the school, or members of the faculty that gave concerts every Friday night, or probably every other Friday night. But always very, very square.

The wonderful thing that Miss Cornish did was insist that all of them--or as many of them as she could get--would stay until the following morning on Saturday and do a concert for children. And every kid in the school--and there were about a thousand of them that took classes after school in music and art and drama and so on--was invited to the concerts. So they would be full of children. And they were marvelous concerts.

They did get some unusual things because I remember hearing John Jacob Niles, who was an early folk singer and collector of Appalachian music and stuff. And he had a woman partner who was

a marvelous singer. And dance concerts and so on, you know. So we saw a lot very early.

However, Mark Tobey, who had been on the faculty at the Cornish School, nobody saw his work. He was mostly in Europe at that time. There was Morris Graves, an up-and-coming young painter who we were just beginning to hear about at that time, who was head of the WPA project. And there were other--Kenneth Callahan, a whole bunch of really interesting painters and stuff.

Bill: In Seattle?

Bonnie: They were all in Seattle. They were Northwest artists. One of the things that I think is important to realize--Seattle and Portland were very isolated because the big city was Chicago, and then San Francisco, and nothing came to Seattle. It was a big effort. Everything "big-time" went from Chicago to San Francisco and then to Los Angeles and Texas or someplace, New Orleans, I think. And so we were bypassed.

As a consequence, it was interesting, because there was a whole regional awareness, a kind of fighting back, that was particularly pronounced in distinctive architecture in the Northwest and manifest in various ways. And there was a kind of do-it-yourself quality to the vigor with which a lot of the artists functioned and became very conscious of being Northwest artists. A person like Morris Graves is a really good example of that.

There was a kind of kinship to the Orient, too, because there were many Japanese and Chinese in Seattle. There was a kinship because of the constant traffic with the big boats, both the passenger boats and the freighters and so on. So there is a good deal of independence in the Northwest.

Well, John and I thought we should do something about this, and we organized an exhibit of contemporary painting. We got Nancy Wilson Ross, a very fine writer who had become a friend of mine and of John's--she was from the Northwest and had travelled with her husband, who was a Northwest architect, to Europe, and they had spent a lot of time at the Bauhaus. So she could write very intelligently on modern art.

We had her do the first lecture on modern art that we knew had ever been done at the Cornish School. And it was a superb lecture. And then John decided to give a percussion concert. He had been a student of Schoenberg in Los Angeles just a few years before. And Schoenberg had--I'll have to find the actual

remark in some of the writings about John--Schoenberg had implied that he [John Cage] would never become a composer, because John was no good at melody and he was no good at harmony.

Well, John wasn't interested in melody and harmony, he was interested in percussion. So he decided--it made him focus on percussion for a long time, and on the whole question of sound.

[end tape 1, side A]

[begin tape 1, side B]

Bonnie: John then decided to do an entirely percussion concert and he had that year--the early part of the year he wrote to Revueltas in Cuba--no, Revueltas was in Mexico--to Caturla, a composer in Cuba. He wrote to a whole group: Ray Green, a composer who was then actually, I think, in San Francisco. He wrote to all kinds of contemporary composers and asked them if they had ever written a piece entirely for percussion of any kind. And he, amazingly, got back scores that they encouraged him to use.

Well, the thing that was fascinating was what the instruments were. Ray Green wrote a piece for pop bottles and toy instruments, and this was what I used. It was based on the folk tune--he called it "Three Inventories of Casey Jones." And it was built on that funny little song, a union song, of how Casey Jones couldn't get into heaven because he never had a union card. And it's a famous song, "Casey Jones comin' 'round the mountain," and so on.

Well, he built the piece on that tune. And I did a piece with Merce and Syvilla and Dorothy Herrmann and myself. I was Casey, and Casey gets buried. [laughter] And Zenia Pashchavera {?}, John's wife, this Russian daughter of the head of Russian Orthodox Church in Sitka, Alaska--. She had grown up in Sitka in the Russian community. And it's interesting, if you go to the Russian community in Alaska now, the women still wear babushkas, and they're very Russian.

Zenia looked like a Modigliani painting, she had a very thin, long face. She'd had tuberculosis of the bone as a child and they got her, I guess, to Seattle. And the only thing they could do was to remove the marrow, or whatever it was, the TB part of the bones. But she had a stiff leg, so she had to walk in a certain way. And she had a very sharp wit.

Well, she'd designed the set for the train coming at you, you know, for me. And that was the opening dance piece on the program.

Heidi: Of John's percussion?

Bonnie: Of John's percussion concert. And it was the last thing we did on the program. But before that there were pieces--the Caturla piece, for example, required the jawbone of an ass. That's an instrument in Cuba because they were so poor they'd play--asses die all over Cuba and their jaw bones are around in the landscape, I guess. They discovered that by hitting one side of the jawbone--it lies on its side--the teeth rattle in the dried-out jawbones, and they make a marvelous sound [laughter].

And then there was the bull roarer, which is a loop of taut leather, like a drumhead, and you drag a rope through it and it vibrates in a rough, marvelous way. Sometimes they have it in a pit {}, you know, like a drum almost, and you draw this through. And then there were gongs that had to be dipped in water to mute them. And there were a whole series of brake drums. I went with John into the parts lots around town, the junkyards. And they thought he was mad because he was looking for brake drums and playing them.

It was a fascinating sort of collection of instruments. And then he had to train people to play this stuff. And Doris Dennison, who lives here in San Francisco, whom I saw the other day, who is eighty-four, was one of the instrumentalists. John, Merce, Zenia, and I think that Lenore Forbes Ward, a viola player who taught at Cornish and was a viola player in the Seattle Symphony, also was one of the people, but I'm not sure if I have her right.

Anyway, they rehearsed and prepared for this concert. This was in our "series," so to speak. Well, the fun thing about this was we didn't know if anybody would come. John decided we had to send out notices, but we had almost no money. So he went to a printer, and got to know the printer a bit, and the printer showed him paper, and John said, "Well, we can't even begin to afford that"--and it was cheap enough. The printer said, "Well I have some long pieces, a lot of it that I've chopped off the end"--of something else he had to do.

John got really excited. It was a really nice quality of paper and he figured out a way of folding it so we could mail it. And it was the program too. He had the man print the whole program in lower case, and you didn't do that in Seattle. No capital letters. Everything looked like e.e. cummings, you know. He printed the whole thing and, of course, he named all the instruments.

Well, this was sent to everybody in the music world and Cornish and so on. We got it out. And the night of the performance people arrived, and you could practically see the chips on their shoulders, they were so, you know, coming "to be shown." There was a man named Steven Balogh who taught piano, who was a darling man, but he hated contemporary--he thought he knew all contemporary music. I can remember that he was the most passionately opposed to this kind of nonsense in music.

And Lady {?} Beck was--oh, we were able to get a Friday evening in the series, but Lady Beck was very nervous about this whole thing because she knew what was going on, and she was beginning to be worried about the whole thing. But the audience was huge and, well, ready to be antagonistic. But in came--and I had not seen what happened just before, and I'll tell you what happened.

Morris Graves was the head of the WPA theater, which was a little project bringing unemployed artists together and employing them to do murals and things around town, you know, noncompetitive sort of stuff and to stimulate their own work. Morris--and the money you got from WPA was just subsistence, but it was something.

Morris augmented his living by going into the woods with a funny little truck he had. It was a sedan that had had the back chopped off it to make it sort of a half-ton truck, like. He would go into the woods and he knew where maidenhair ferns and beautiful ferns were. And he would cut these and bring them in to sell to florists and get a little bit more money.

He also loved junkyards--we didn't have garage sales in those days, we just had to go to the dump. And he went to the dump and found a wonderful plump red chair, an upholstered chair, and he stuck that in the back of the car. And he found yards of red runner, carpeting, in rolls, and he put that in the back of the car.

All his friends would go with him. And he would sit in the chair and they'd roll the carpet out at a, you know, a five and dime or any place, and he would walk in like the Emperor {?} from someplace. And he arrived, apparently, at the Cornish School that night--later, I learned from Morris that he had decided that the Cornish School was a wonderful place, but they never let any air in, and they should open all their windows and let air come through.

Heidi: Too stuffy?

Bonnie: Too stuffy. And so he decided to shock them by coming to this concert. Well, he chose the wrong concert. He didn't know it, though, he thought it was going to be just one of those ordinary concerts. And he arrived in this manner. His underlings had rolled up the carpet and put it away, and he walked into the theater followed by the most motley-looking crew.

Now, I had a student named Joyce Weich {?}, who later became a very remarkable anthropologist, who was already studying the Swinamish Indians and going to the university and studying with me. And she knew everybody in town--she was such an avant garde character herself--and she was standing next to me when they walked in, and I heard her under her breath saying, "Oh, my God." She knew there was going to be something happen in the theater. [laughter]

They sat down in a long row. There were about five of them, I think. And the Cornish School was fairly poor, so we didn't have carpets on the floor. It was just cement with these iron seats, you know, just wooden sort of seats like school seats, and two aisles on either side of the theater. And they began to eat shelled peanuts, as if they were in the circus, and dropping the shells on the floor and eating and chewing and talking.

People would look forward at them. And when he got a couple of looks, Morris raised a lorgnette he'd made out of false eyebrows and he would turn and look at them through these false eyebrows. So people were just in a state before the concert even began.

The concert began with John. The curtain opened and people saw all these strange instruments on the stage, but the players were all very circumspect, except they didn't wear jackets. They were in black, with white shirts, and the girls were in black, and the men had ties, black ties. They were very neat looking, it wasn't wacky looking at all.

And then John came forward and spoke to the audience. Well, he is the most beguiling speaker, and he was very young then, so there was this kind of innocent, enthusiastic quality that was very hard to resist, I must say. He spoke about the music and how it had happened and so on, and he was sort of warming the audience up. And then they started playing.

And at one point there was a silence, a long silence in the music. And Morris rose and said, "Jesus in the everywhere," and sat down. It was a nonsense remark.

Well, by this time Mrs. Beck was absolutely livid, and the audience--it was great for John--because the audience, having come to hate him, got so focussed on this character, Morris, that they were taking the attitude of sympathy toward this darling young man who was trying so hard, you know. [laughter] And so Mrs. Beck got the head of radio {?}, who was a tall man, and somebody else to go down the aisle and to ask Morris to leave.

Heidi: At the intermission?

Bonnie: At the intermission. Morris was very agreeable to leaving, but he got to the aisle and he lay down--passive resistance. So they picked him up, and he was so lumpy, and he's terribly tall, about six feet four, and skinny, so he stiffened himself out to help them. And they carried him out past Mrs. Beck's bosom, which was ample, and as he went by, he said, "Good evening, Lady Beck, a very interesting evening." And they chucked him out. [laughter]

Well, this was really so ridiculous. The rest of the concert went very well and John won a lot of favor on that concert. I understand, actually, that the police were called. They were sort of roving around, but they couldn't see anything that was upsetting at all. And Morris apparently came back and snuck up stairs to the balcony because I think he recognized that he had erred on the evening of the thing. And he and John became very good friends and actually for a while lived in the same funny old Victorian building that they had apartments in.

I remember John saying how hopeless it was to try to control Morris, because Morris was in their house all the time. Zenia and John had relatives that were coming to visit in Seattle--and they both had terribly square relatives--and Morris arrived when the relatives were there, stark naked, with a bottle of milk. [laughter] John couldn't let him in, he threw him out. He said, "I'm just delivering the milk." Well, things like that happened all the time.

But going back to Syvilla Fort's concert and "The Marriage at the Eiffel Tower," this was a very lively year, to say the least. And the actual pieces came off very well.

"Imaginary Landscapes"

Bonnie: I did also another piece, which was quite groundbreaking, called "The Imaginary Landscape." When I was teaching, one day, I was going through the business of lifting your arm with some sort of

sense of cutting through space and so on, and I kept saying to the kids, "Your arms are beautiful, raise them as if they are beautiful," and so on. I had been saying this over and over to them.

I finally turned to John, and I said, "I don't know if an arm's very beautiful if you just had an arm raising in space and no body attached to it." And it began a whole kind of thing with us, in discussion, to try to figure out if the body is required to be attached to the arm if it's to be beautiful, moving, and the whole concept of what is beautiful and so on.

I got very intrigued with what would happen to the audience's eye if they saw dismembered parts of the body floating around or moving around the stage. So I got somebody in the production area to build three triangles for me, black cloth stretched over frames of triangle that had little sort of feet so they could stand up. They stood about this high [indicating] and went down to this. And one of them was truncated at the top.

Then I had a six-foot tall rectangle, just wide enough for Merce to be behind with a tiny little step so he could step up and his head could be seen at the top. I put these against black curtains and used only a kind of--I actually went looking for lights and found that Coast Guard lights were terrific, because I wanted light that could hone in and pick up without spilling. And because of the intensity of those lights it could do it. But we couldn't afford having Coast Guard lights there, didn't have the power for it either.

But we got something quite interesting. I started making this work and experimenting, so that I had a dancer behind each triangle, me behind one, and Syvilla and Dorothy behind another, and I discovered I could do things like create a body that covered the whole stage. Merce's head here, near the rectangle, and then you'd see torsos stretched between the triangles and legs moving at the other end like some long figure lying down. Because you didn't see the black things against the black curtains.

You would see a head, Merce's head way up, and then sliding down the side while two sets of legs walked down the stage. [laughter] It was fascinating. And I would have the rectangle interrupt the two, and they'd skitter away, you know. Or you'd see only hands moving in space.

Well, I made this work, and John wrote the music. And the music, interestingly enough, came about in another accident.

Ralph was doing research on music at the university on how people respond to music, the whole question of emotion and what is there in the music that produces these kinds of feelings, associations, and so on.

As a result, he was receiving, out of his own curiosity, some research that was going on in pure sound. I think Bell Telephone was involved in this in some way, the research laboratories on sound. And they had produced a record that was just a pure sound, one sound. I mean it could have been C.

Heidi: Like a tone?

Bonnie: Like a tone. And you played it on a record player. But we discovered that by increasing and decreasing the speeds you got fantastic sort of curling variation on that tone--the pitch would shift. Ralph had two of these, and I brought them to John, and John immediately went to their radio studio, put them on the turntable, and scored these things. He had somebody in the radio studio playing those plates {?}.

He used a piano, if I remember correctly--I don't remember all the instruments that he did use. And the piano had a long board--I mean, there was a long board covered with rug. And this was laid on the piano and rocked back and forth so you got these curious kinds of floods of sound. I don't remember if he put things in the piano.

Anyway, he made this score calmed "Imaginary Landscape," and that was piped in from the radio studio to the theater. And it had no rhythm, it was all sound, and it drove us nearly bats trying to learn how to work with this, you know. We started together and ended together, but we weren't always sure we were going to come out right because we didn't have much to hang on to, and we were very used to counting music or responding to it.

But we figured it out. And literally this is like Merce later on, we had to do exactly the same thing, learn through peripheral vision and relating to each other, how to develop and sustain a pulse where we needed it.

Well, actually, the concert was a very interesting concert, as a result of these very experimental kinds of things, and certainly made life a lot of fun for all of us.

Heidi: This was the second year?

Bonnie: Second year. And then I went down to Mills College, which I did talk about, with Merce and Dorothy. I don't think Syvilla went,

but a number of other students did go. And that was the summer that Betty Lynn (?) Thompson made the color film of me doing Graham technique on the Mills stage.

Heidi: Were you going to say anything about Syvilla's concert?

Bonnie: Syvilla's concert was an immense success. She was an extraordinary dancer. That particular piece, the "Bacchanal," was really a very, very beautiful piece, and John's music was absolutely right for it. He also wrote another piece for her, I can't remember that too well. I have her program. And then she graduated and began to try to develop her own dances and have dancers working with her, in Seattle. And we had started the Seattle Artists' League, and so we presented her.

A New Interest in Dance--Adults and High School Students

Bonnie: Then I came back after Mills, after the summer, and I was really determined that I was going to, as I said, try to involve young people. I got the idea of doing "America Was Promises," and John said he'd write the music for it, and he'd make it a four-hand piano piece. By this time I had gotten to know the Repertory Playhouse actors and people at the Playhouse. And there was a young man named Jerry van Steenberg who had a wonderful voice, marvelous voice, and I had him read the poem.

I auditioned--I sent out notices in January or so, I guess, February, to all the high school dance teachers. And interestingly enough, as a result of Bennington College, dance was being taught in a lot of high schools all around the United States.

[end tape 1, side B]

[begin tape 2, side A]

Bonnie: I had gotten to know a lot of the teachers teaching in the different high schools. They had come to study with me at Cornish. I taught evening classes too.

Heidi: For adults?

Bonnie: For adults. Every once in a while, I mean, it would be a block of classes. In fact, I actually taught a class for university professors that Ralph organized because he wanted to dance. And that was the funniest class. That must have been the second year. It was after Dad [Ralph] and I'd married. I said yes, I would teach an evening class.

Well, all the younger professors came, with their wives, too. Some of them had just had babies and were feeling--the women tended to drop out, but the men didn't. Oh, Bob Eigelhart and his wife, and Melvin Rader {?} and his wife--all people who became very well known in their own fields, many of whom were attacked by the Canwell Committee later.

It was the most fun class, but the most challenging and difficult class. And I asked some of my students to join the class so they could demonstrate, and it was a kind of stimulating thing for them.

I remember that I had one girl, Mary--she married eventually Vincent Price, the actor, and she became a very outstanding costume designer. She was a girl from Vancouver or Victoria, prim and proper and terribly thin and not beautiful, but an interesting person. Dance was quite difficult for her because she couldn't let go, she was so tight in so many ways, but she was passionately interested in it. And I remember that she was in this class.

And I was having them run in a circle. And of course, they'd all been athletes, so they ran like--and I kept saying "No, I don't want you to run like that." And they said, "Well, that's the way you get around," you know, they'd argue with me. [laughter] I really had to fight with them. I'd get them running and I'd try to get them to look like something, and they'd keep plowing around.

Finally I did get them running. And Mary stopped and stood against a wall. And Ralph--or some one of them, I'm not sure it was Ralph--ran up the wall on either side of her. Well, she felt like she'd been raped. [laughter] I had never seen anybody go white! Afterwards they'd all go have beer. It was an absolutely comic class, the whole thing, and it lasted about one semester before they all got too involved.

So I did do these classes that anyone could come to. And that's how a lot of the high school teachers got to know about the work, but they had known about me at Bennington, too. And so I had an audition--

Heidi: For the high school kids?

Bonnie: For the high school kids, all women, to get into a six-weeks project where they would have to come after school every day and rehearse for this piece that I was going to do with about twelve of them, I guess. I chose twelve.

Well, they were wonderful, absolutely marvelous kids, and Peggy Roarke {?} was one of them, who was here the other day. One of them was a girl named Jacobs--I'm trying to think of her first name. I had not seen her since that time, but she flew here for my eightieth birthday. She's on the State of Arizona's Arts Council, and has been an extremely successful buyer for a big company, fashion stuff, and now retired.

She heard about where I was from Ellen Bromberg {?} in Arizona, who had won a scholarship, or won something, for the state for a dance she did based on the dance she did in England with our company. My name came into it and this woman got in touch with Ellen, and then got in touch with me about the address, and she flew for my birthday.

She's very beautiful. I immediately remembered who she was, and I have photographs of her as a dancer in the group. She said that her family, a Jewish family, would never allow her to make dance her life work. They insisted that she had to do something practical and she got into fashion and selling, I guess, mainly.

Anyway, we rehearsed for the six weeks. I had a set built. The piece was really quite an interesting piece, I think. It covered a kind of historic thing of people coming--I actually had the dancers move like a boat coming across water, coming down a long ramp in a kind of prow-of-a-boat fashion, and it was in various sections. I used my company, I mean my trained dancers, who were already feeling like a company, as the principal dancers, and the young girls were the chorus, sort of.

The dress rehearsal was absolutely hysterical. I had a tiny little girl who was full of energy, just a marvelous child. And they had to run up a ramp and leap off at the end. Well, they weren't supposed to go off, actually. But if they had to, they would have leaped. Well, she just disappeared. She wasn't in the dance, she fell off someplace, we couldn't find her, she fell behind the scenery and sort of got herself up and back on. [laughter] All kinds of goofy things happened and would crack us up too.

This group, they wanted to stay together after working for six weeks, you know. Well, it wasn't practical, but I did keep quite a few of them going. They were invited to take classes with the adult students. And several of them were actually fired--. Eloise Jordan and Peggy stayed on with me the next year when I opened a studio, because I left Cornish at the end of that year.

Heidi: They were fired, like, you mean "fired up?"

Bonnie: Fired up, yes, all fired up.

Heidi: [laughs] Who could fire a high school student?

Bonnie: Yes, you can't fire them from a job they don't have.

An Ending--John and Zenia Leave

Bonnie: So that year ended. And what did I do in 1940? I was getting pretty discouraged about the battle with the Cornish School, and I left. I guess they didn't accept my terms, I don't know.

Heidi: They were not supportive of "America was Promises" or including the high school students?

Bonnie: No, they were happy that it was a success and so on, but they never would do anything, never could get the publicity and the support. I had to do absolutely everything and never got any kind of support at all.

Bill: Did John stay?

Bonnie: No. John was leaving at the end of that year. He and Zenia decided that they would go--if I remember correctly he went to California first. But he eventually went to Chicago to the Chicago Art Institute to work with Moholy Nagy, and he was there for a year at least.

Moholy Nagy had come from the Bauhaus. The German Jews were having to get out and Moholy Nagy had been invited to head the Chicago Art Institute, which is a very good art institute. He was making real waves already in Chicago and John went to study there for a year.

And then John went to New York. I don't know whether he was one or two years at the Chicago Art Institute, but he and Zenia took an apartment in New York on Hudson Street, if I remember correctly. And it was fascinating. It had no heat, they had to have cannel coal. I never knew about cannel coal, which was the only thing they allowed in New York if you had a coal stove because it didn't create the same kind of dust or smoke or whatever.

The house was full of things Zenia was doing with bones and shells and stuff. She did mobile-like things.

Heidi: Was she a sculptor?

Bonnie: She was a kind of a dilettante artist in the sense that she hadn't actually trained for anything, but she had remarkably good taste and an interest in projects of all kinds. She eventually actually worked until she retired in a museum and specialized in some area within the museum.

She was a very cynical sort of person, a difficult person. It was after--well, I can't remember the year, but I guess it was during the war that Ralph had traded jobs with George Vetter {?}. George Vetter was a psychologist who had been at the University of Washington and then went to NYU and taught psychology. He traded with Ralph because he wanted to spend the summer on the West Coast, and we wanted to spend the summer on the East Coast.

Heidi: What year was that?

Bonnie: Joan was fifteen, so it was 1946. Joan went East with a friend of hers with us, but we started out by driving to Los Angeles--or maybe Ralph had to teach, I don't remember--and then we drove East through the South. And that was a real experience.

We picked up Vic Steinbruck {?}, who had fallen for Margery Nelson, and Margery'd fallen for Howard de Silva. Vic was just out of the service and he didn't have a job, so we said "Well, Vic, come on with us to New York and brood over your failed love."

And we had a big house in Queens in the section called Flushing. But where we lived, they called it the "Flushing Bowl," because there was this great marshy area. [laughter] That's where the World's Fair was held in '39, I guess.

Anyway, it was a quite crazy summer with Ralph's teaching at NYU, which he quite enjoyed. And Joan and her girlfriend got a job in a candy store on 5th Avenue selling candy. And I was taking classes madly in New York, and Vic was wandering around.

Bill: Dance classes?

Bonnie: Dance classes, yes, at the Graham studio.

Bill: In 1946?

Bonnie: Yes. They had summer classes at night. I don't think I was very diligent that summer. Then, going back to 1940, '40-'41, that was the summer, I think, that Ralph taught at USC, and that

we had decided that when he finished teaching we were going to drive to Mexico. There was something going on in Mexico, and I'm trying to think whether it was an international labor--you know, there was some big celebration, and it was going on for quite a few weeks, and Ralph was very eager to go.

But I got very distressed about the fact that I was going back to no job. And I had been discussing with a friend, a woman who was a student of mine but who was the wife of a doctor in Seattle, opening a studio in the University District. And she had said she would help with the whole thing. And I think she must have called me or something and said she had found a space, so I decided I couldn't go to Mexico, that I had to go back in late August, early September, to settle and get things going.

I found two lovely women for Ralph to take to Mexico with him, a marvelous, beautiful young woman who was a dancer, and another young woman who was a psychology student. I think she'd been a student of his at USC. And so they had a marvelous time going to Mexico, and I have marvelous letters from Ralph of that whole trip, and photographs too.

Bill: You went down to USC while Ralph was teaching that summer?

Bonnie: Yes, and we had a little house in Los Angeles. And Ralph quite enjoyed the change.

[end side B)

[Interview #14, November 2, 1994]
 [begin tape #1, side A]
 [Bonnie and Bill. Also present, Marion North]

XI A SHARED HISTORY: MARION NORTH AND BONNIE BIRD AND THE LABAN CENTER

Bill: What we want to do today is to cover the way the two of you met, your time in England, and your working together.

Marion: That's twenty-one years' worth!

Bill: How did you meet? What brought you together?

Marion: From my point of view, it was an invitation from the Dance Notation Bureau where Bonnie was working at that point to come over [to America] and do a few workshops and classes. And she said, "We can't afford to put you up anywhere, so come and stay with me."

I said to Ann Hutchinson {?} in London, "Where does she live, what is she like, who is this woman?" And she said, "Oh she has a wonderful barn." [laughter] I said, "Well, what can I take her for a present? She's putting me up." And she said, "Take some little"--what's it called? Horse--oh, I don't know.

Bonnie: Little medallions.

Marion: Yes, you know the things that you put around horseshoes and so on for over her fireplace. {unclear}

Bill: This is the barn in Hastings?

Marion: Yes. So that was when I first knew her.

That first visit was a very hard-working--I must say [to Bonnie], you worked me very hard. But we immediately realized that we had so many interests in common, with the Bureau, with myself, with Bonnie, that we followed that up very quickly with another visit.

Bonnie: Now I tell my side! I was Director of Education at the Dance Notation Bureau. Irmgard Bertanyev {?} was developing a training program in Laban analysis, that is, utilizing Laban's system and based on his theories. He didn't have a system as such, but he had two notation programs that complemented each other.

The Dance Notation Bureau was already heavily involved and had for almost thirty-five or forty years been training notators to notate dances for reconstruction purposes, immediately or in the future. It was a highly developed center which was, at that time, receiving quite a bit of government money for the purpose of notating major dance works in the US.

But there was this other side of Laban's work that Irmgard was interested in, and using. Irmgard Bertanyev was a German dancer who had studied with Laban, and she and her husband were a team, a duo, as dancers. They had to leave Germany because of the Nazis, and she left in the '30s and came with two small sons to this country.

Her husband was never happy in this country, he could not make the cultural shift, and so he went back to Germany, but not till after the war. She came in the--I don't know the precise time, in the '30s I believe. And she had two sons to raise and she got herself a job as a housemother in a private school, and they got their schooling and living, as I remember this.

And then she trained as a physical therapist--this was in Massachusetts. She had great facility as a physical therapist, and she got a job at some later time--the boys, I think, were probably already somewhat grown, and she was living in New York by that time--she got a job as a physical therapist in Blithedale (?) Hospital in Valhalla. This was supported by the Jewish agencies in New York.

Marion: She actually developed the whole area of soft tissue massage, which was not just orthodox physio.

Bonnie: That's right.

Marion: And it was this aspect which was really widening of her vision of what physiotherapy could be and really made her link with the Laban analysis and the Laban work. It was movement, it was soft tissue massage, and physiotherapy, in combination.

Bonnie: The important thing about Blithedale was that this was a hospital for children, established for children who had infantile paralysis. And she was so effective at getting children mobilized, because she applied all this information.

Marion: That's right.

Bonnie: And that's where the "effort aspects"--she began to see that the effort, the qualitative aspects that are important to mobilize

the children, plus her physical therapy--she was able to develop the kinds of exercises, the kinds of patterns of movement behavior that helped the children immensely.

Marion: She helped them to motivate themselves, as distinct from being passive and being--

Bill: --more traditional physical therapy.

Marion: That's right. And this is why it was so dramatic, it was very dramatic.

Bonnie: She was also a notator. She was one of the early founding members of the Dance Notation Bureau in the '40s. And she continued to do all kinds of work in connection with patients, but she also began to do dance therapy. There was this whole thing of her becoming much more sophisticated.

She began to be intensely interested in the observation and notation, effort notation, of the qualitative aspects of people's movement, which is the big contribution to dance therapy, is to have a tool, a frame of reference for looking at human movement, and being able to notate it. And to then look at the notation and begin to see the patterns that are repetitive in the way we identify ourselves as human beings.

Because everybody responds differently doing exactly the same things, like shaking a hand--how they do it is the qualitatively different thing that makes it significant. It's what makes a child recognize someone coming down the hall in the dark. Or you, before you know who it is, you already are reading clues from their movement, from the quality of their movement, not just the fact they are walking.

Bill: Now, did she develop a notation system?

Marion: No, this was a Laban notation, but she used it, and she developed her own very specialized way of linking the movement analysis with her own physiological and physical therapy side. The Laban work went down, say, a central core stream, and she did a slight developmental area which has been extraordinarily effective, this particular area. Many, many people have taken up that study.

Bill: She used a notation system--

Marion: --that Laban already had invented--

Bill: --but applied in a different way.

Marion: Slightly different, yes, that's right. Because he never used it himself on a physical therapy side.

Bill: Her application could then be taught?

Marion: Yes. And it's called a various number of things: "effort shape," or "Laban movement analysis," or the "Laban-Bartenyev system." There are lots of different combinations.

Bonnie: Irmgard had studied with Marion in England for a short period.

Marion: I used to do short courses and holiday courses and two-week courses, and that sort of thing.

Bill: Marion, I don't know a lot of your background. It would help for you to say something about yourself and what you were doing.

Marion: All right. Well, I had studied with Laban in the last ten years of his life--he died in '58. And then I went off on my own and did work in factories and in art centers and in colleges, in dance, and gradually developed my own use of his work, really.

I did a whole training for myself, really, via an MA and a Ph.D., in analyzing children's movement, and then in the Ph.D., from babies of three days old onwards in the developmental patterns. And all that time, I was actually working with groups of people taking these kind of courses. People like Kestenberg {?} came to study, and a whole range of people like Irmgard.

And, as it were, for some years after he [Laban] died I was carrying his work for a while before I really went off and did a whole range of other things.

Bonnie: I think it would be nice to know the range of the other things, like the fact that you became director of Sydney Webb dance department.

Marion: Yes. But before that I was running an art center for a factory where they were doing a very imaginative thing, where the factory workers--small factory, about fifty people--the wives, or husbands, and children, all came in the evenings and weekends to do "the arts." And they were painting and potting and singing.

I, of course, took the dance side, and we made what we--we daren't call them dances for these big beefy men, butchers and all sorts of workman level and their children, so we called them pageants. And somewhere in the archives there is a film of the major pageant we did, you know, which was a big event.

And also working on how to make their lives in the factory more pleasant, to make them a bit like work-study, you know, fitting the material to them rather than them to the material.

Bill: What prompted the owner of this factory to introduce this?

Marion: He was very involved in the whole thing. I mean without his support it wouldn't have happened. And that went on for about five or six years.

Bill: What got him interested in it?

Marion: What got him interested? Good question, I don't know. He had a vision somewhere of the arts. He wasn't an artist himself, but he had a vision that it could be useful. He had a big social interest in doing something for the people he was working with.

He then got off onto--abandoning the whole thing and going off to Greece and being a guru. So it sort of went off on another tangent. The factory just went on, then, in the normal way that most factories do, and the whole of the arts side was closed down.

And at that point I went then, as Bonnie said, to be the head of dance at another college in London, a teacher training college called Sydney Webb.

Bonnie: Which was a fascinating college because it was developed after the Second World War when they were desperate for teachers and began to realize that there were--

Marion: It was only for mature students.

Bonnie: It was only for mature students. And these were people who had never had a chance to go to college because of the war.

Marion: Many of them were taxi drivers or butchers, bakers--it doesn't matter who they were--housewives, all coming back after they had had a family or done something else. The average age was about thirty-five to forty.

Bill: Interesting group.

Marion: Very interesting. And most of those people--I mean not everyone, obviously--but most of them became heads of schools or important people in education. They brought to it, of course, another whole range of interests from an eighteen-year-old, obviously.

As Bonnie says, I developed the first dance department within that concept. And we used to get what was very unusual in those days in colleges, we used to get more men than women wanting to do movement and dance. As distinct from most of the colleges where the boys wanted to play football and it was the girls who wanted to dance. So it was a very special era, and I was there for eight years, running that program.

Bill: Why do you think that the men were more interested?

Marion: Well, I think the dance side of it was because many of them had their own children, many of them were seeing that their children were needing something that was not being offered in most of the schools. And many of them thought this was a fascinating area to delve into and understand.

Bonnie: Was the Labor Party--?

Marion: No, there was no real relationship.

Bonnie: No relationship? No leadership?

Marion: No, no.

Bonnie: Because was the Arts Council not developed at that time?

Marion: No. I mean they were all there, but this particular college, this was a particular--this was a product of the Labor Party's policy to get teachers, they were so short of teachers. So they made these colleges which then, of course, disintegrated, and when they had got enough teachers, they just closed them down. I left before that was closed.

But the idea was to get mature people into college, into schools. And of course they had, funnily enough, a longer span in the schools than most eighteen-year-olds. Most eighteen-year-olds train, and then they have a limited number of years before they marry and then go out of teaching, and most of them don't go back.

These people came in at maybe thirty-five or forty, but they had twenty, twenty-five years of solid teaching ahead of them. And I'm still in touch with some of those people whom I taught, many of whom were older than I was, of course. I was still only in my early--well, late twenties, early thirties, and they were already, you know, much older. They were fascinating people, and they brought a wonderful richness of background into teaching so that they taught with a knowledge of the world which no

eighteen-year-old, nineteen-year-old can do, because they hadn't lived.

So the dance and the movement side was particularly interesting. One doesn't know--. If I hadn't been there and if they had appointed just somebody on a physical education side, it wouldn't have--. They didn't like physical education much. They didn't like having to jump over horses and play games and that sort of thing. They were way beyond what seemed to them very adolescent kind of enjoyment. They might like to play for themselves, but they weren't interested to develop that side.

Bill: But they experienced this as more creative?

Marion: Oh, much more, yes. And I taught it entirely from a creative point of view because the schools that these people were going into were primary up to twelve-year-olds. So that it was a primary program. Yes, it was essentially creative, and that's, of course, what caught them.

Bonnie: I'm not sure of the dates in England but in this country this time in the '50s and '60s was the period when I was relating to education of teachers to teach creatively. And we were immensely impressed with what was happening in England as we gradually heard about it--

Marion: There was wonderful work going on.

Bonnie: --because every child danced in the schools, boys and girls, the children had no inhibition about taking off their shirts and being in their little shorts and little vests and dancing--.

Marion: And you saw films that were made of that period. They were wonderful.

Bonnie: They were wonderful, absolutely. The few dancers that had an opportunity to go--. I remember Joe Gifford {?} from Boston who was a very well-known dancer and was teaching at Boston University, he went to West Riding, which is a famous place in Yorkshire where the coordinator of the whole program was a remarkable man. And he had dance people, art people under him who were working in all the schools.

Marion: This was Diana Jordan. He appointed Diana Jordan--this was Klegg {?}. And he appointed Diana Jordan as the, what we used to then call the Inspector of Schools. And she used to go around to all the schools, and they used to help the teachers how to develop

the work. They weren't critical inspectors, they were supportive.

The same happened in Lancashire, the same happened in many, many areas. Bonnie's vision of all the children dancing is a little bit exaggerated because they didn't all. But in the good areas--I mean in West Riding you wouldn't find a school, a primary school, where they weren't doing some creative work of some kind. It was wonderful.

Bonnie: It was wonderful, absolutely marvelous. And the kind of exuberance of the children, the release, it was so visible on the films.

Bill: Did that happen because of the administration?

Marion: It happened because Laban's work in England synchronized with the 1948 Education Act, Butler Act, where it was called "child-centered." And it synchronized with Laban saying that children shouldn't just be regimented into moving in patterns which are preordained by adults, but they should be creative in themselves. The two things just clicked.

And it was mainly the women physical educationists at that time who were very excited about this and incorporated, really, the dance side into the schools. And it was mainly in the primary schools.

The problem was, when the children got to eleven or twelve, the work that the primary schools had done so well, the women who followed Laban's ideas never went beyond where he finished there--which he didn't, he went on. He said, "Now you have to start training in a very different way."

Just as, say, in art training, suddenly the students need to know about perspective, they need to know about color, they need to know about design. They can't just go on being free. So you have to then start teaching them.

And then that was the big block of the physical education teachers: they had no dance training, they only had creative movement. So even the most creative of them didn't know where to go from there. So there was a big block of time, and the children, then--eleven, twelve, thirteen--began to say, "We don't want to do that, we've done all that. We don't want to be doing all this jumping around any more."

And it wasn't until from America the importation of Graham work particularly, initially, came in, which was then very appropriate for the younger adolescents--

Bill: Because of the discipline.

Marion: Because of the technique, yes. I mean, they had always had discipline, it wasn't undisciplined, this freedom. It was very disciplined freedom. But it was always relying on their invention.

Now, what came in was, "Here is something you can learn, here is some technique which will help your invention." And, of course, what they did then inevitably swung too much to only doing technique. Then that's veered out. And now, the range of dance, in England--all children in the national curriculum have to dance until they're fourteen, it's part of the national curriculum. After that it's an optional subject.

So there's a very clear development pattern for dance in England.

Bonnie: The problem is that they are not training the teachers to do this.

Marion: Well, for secondary work--there a lot of trained teachers in secondary now. The thing has switched.

But that's all by the by, because it's sort of in the background.

Bonnie: But it isn't by the by because I don't think I would have gone to England if it hadn't been for the fact that I had this interest in a broader approach to dance that was significantly different in England.

Marion: Right. But, you see, the interesting thing was, when I came to America and met Bonnie, I was already interested in training, I was already at the Laban Center. I was already interested in the next layer, the higher education level. And I was interested in setting up a performers course, which we didn't have. All we had then when I took over was a dance education course, so that teachers came and they were taught how to teach.

Bonnie: I should interrupt here to say that the Laban Center was recognized by the government as a primary dance training place.

Bill: For dance education?

Bonnie: For dance education. And so they had what were called sandwich courses, which fascinated me. If you went to the Chelsea School of Education--

Marion: That was the only one, love, it was only one course.

Bonnie: Was it only one course?

Marion: Only one course, only one place. The main training was in the three-year, fulltime training. But the one at Chelsea was one year at Chelsea, one with us, and then one year back at Chelsea.

Bonnie: So they specialized in that year in dance because then they became really trained in dance education for primary schools.

Marion: But the major training was two years at the Laban Center, and then one year doing educational theory.

Bill: Sounds as though you were looking for performance--

Bonnie: I was looking for performance.

Bill: --and Bonnie was looking for education.

Marion: Exactly, exactly. And that's what happened. Bonnie didn't get into teacher training per se in England at all, but what she did have was this interest in where we came from. What I was desperately looking for was somebody who would start up and give me help on a training course for performers, which is exactly what Bonnie's background was. I had the other side that she was interested in, so it worked.

She set up, well, a whole series of courses over the years, but the very first one was a dance theater. And we called it dance theater. It was very important that we didn't call it dance performance or dance technique or--it was a dance theater. So we envisaged right from the beginning the whole element of theatrical dance. It was a diploma course which lasted three years. And it was the prerunner of the BA course in dance, which was the first one in England, an honors degree course in dance, which we based on our experience of running the diploma course.

So Bonnie was involved right away from the beginning. Before she actually arrived we had advertised the course and got a group of twenty-something students, coming to do that course, which she then had not interviewed, she just had them there, for the course. And they were a motley crew, I can tell you that.

Bonnie: Marion said, "We just have to get started," and that was true, so I said, "I'll take 'em."

Bill: Now, did all this planning take place on your visit to the States when you were staying with Bonnie?

Marion: Well, it started on the visit to the States, and then, of course, when I went back we kept in touch.

Bonnie: Well, it all took place within a period--

Marion: Very short period of time.

Bonnie: --of six months. Marion came in 1973 at our invitation, and she was such a dazzling teacher that she was immediately invited to Maryland and to several other places to give workshops. There was a kind of buzz going. And that has gone on and developed.

But she came back several times then. She was able to get a week off, or two weeks, and to come. And then she had invited me to come for seven weeks--actually, it was to be nine.

Marion: It was a whole term, actually, in our terms, to Goldsmith's.

Bonnie: She invited me to come to Goldsmith's. She was already heading both the dance department at Goldsmith's which she had taken over from her job at Sydney Webb. Goldsmith's was the only dance department in the country at that time that was not in physical education. And that was unique.

Marion: It was the only reason I went there. But at the same time they had taken on the Laban Center. So I headed the Laban Center and the dance department. It was crazy.

Bonnie: And it was thirty miles apart. So it was a wild kind of thing.

Marion: So Bonnie was invited. And we actually, because we couldn't afford it from the Center, we actually paid her via Goldsmith's. And she came for a term. And it was during that term that the real basic sort of work began.

But you cut it short, your seven weeks, because Ralph got ill.

Bonnie: He had a heart attack, a second one.

Marion: While you were in England.

Bill: Was he with you in England?

Bonnie: He was not with me in England. He was home and practicing and keeping an eye on the children. Well, actually, Heidi was off at college at Earlham--no, she was just finished--yes, she had gone to Earlham.

Marion: Yes, she was.

Bonnie: And Michael was at Tufts. So it was Scott that was home. He was finishing at Scarborough that year, '73. And then he went to White Mountain College, or prep school. And so I had to go home early, just a few weeks early.

But it was then that we made the decision that, this being a second heart attack for Ralph, we should consider his really retiring and concentrating on writing or whatever he could do that was not so stressful. We had actually bought the house on High Street in order to give him an office in Westchester, and hoped that he would work at home. But it's a very slow process to get to develop a new practice.

Marion: He was travelling into New York, wasn't he, regularly?

Bonnie: Yes, he was going still into New York every day. And doing the work that he was doing at Metropolitan, and Flower Fifth Avenue, his research project, as well as his practice at home and in New York. He was really pulled very hard.

Marion: And it was a strain.

Bonnie: So then when I was back there, Marion began to make plans to invite me to come and to head this new department called the theater department.

Now, part of the reason that we decided to do this was, to my memory, twofold. One was the fact that Marion was confronted with inheriting a group of teachers who had been totally dominated by a woman, Lisa Ullmann. She was the principal of the school, and she had been a student and coworker with Laban for all the years that he was in England. She was a woman of enormous talent.

[End of Side A, Begin Tape 1, Side B]

Marion: She was a remarkable woman, actually, and without her the Center would not be there. I mean simply it was her energy and her enthusiasm. But she was locked into the dance education system,

and the whole thing was dying down. The other colleges were coming up and saying, "We can train people just as well as the Laban Center."

Bonnie: They were developing departments.

Marion: And when I was appointed, it was not developing in the artistic sense that I thought it should go. I knew that if we didn't change it would die.

Bill: Was there a commitment from the school to support the part that interested you?

Marion: No.

Bonnie: Not at all. And she had no support from her teachers because they were resentful, on the whole, or apprehensive.

Marion: Except for Simone. Simone Michelle was a pupil of Leyda {?} and had been a dancer, and she was very, very enthusiastic about the whole thing.

Bonnie: And so Marion had the very tough job of coming in and turning this Center around and trying to find out who would support her from that staff. So it was perfectly clear to me when I came to teach in the fall--and I went back and forth between Goldsmith's and the Center--that she was testing me to see whether the teachers would accept me. Was I able to be sufficiently objective and nonjudgmental and so on, so that they would be comfortable in working? Or at least civil.

She seemed to be satisfied with that side of it because there was quite a lot of curiosity and enthusiasm. She did some pretty wild things. I brought films from Murray Louis and Alwin Nikolais, wonderful new dance films that had been made and never been seen in England. So Marion took the film center in the middle of London and invited all the colleges to see the films. [laughter] So we did quite a number of things.

During that period I also attended, with Marion, the first meeting of professionals and educationalists who had been like the biggest abyss you could imagine. They hated each other, literally. The educationalists hated the professionals; the professionals hated the educationalists.

Marion: They were frightened of each other, really, basically.

Bonnie: They were so--it was incredible, and they talked different languages. Well, Peter Brinson, who was head of the Gulbenkian Foundation, and Peter had been--he was a Cambridge political science graduate--

Marion: Oxford, dear.

Bonnie: Oxford, excuse me, I'm always mixing the two up.

[telephone interruption]

Bonnie: Peter Brinson was an Oxford graduate--I stand corrected--in political science. But he was fascinated with ballet and trained in ballet and became a ballet dancer, but never got beyond chorus, I don't think. But he had a passion about dance and he established an organization which was ancillary to the Royal Ballet called "Ballet for All." He was also very deeply an educationalist.

Marion: And he was a good dance historian, political dance.

Bonnie: And a brilliant man.

He had been made head of Gulbenkian, so he was pressing not only Gulbenkian's great commitment to medical developments and social developments and housing and all manner of things, but also the arts. And they were giving a great deal at this time.

So he called together the professionals and the educationalists for a meeting. There must have been about forty people at the meeting. I have never sat in a Tower of Babel before, but it was that. The chasm and the fever--you could feel it. And you couldn't find very many people that were ready at that point to even talk with each other.

Bill: Was he unaware that that was going to happen?

Bonnie: Oh, he knew it was there. That's why he called them together, because he was in a position to make people come--you didn't say no to the Gulbenkian Foundation. Because they all had their own agendas, too, in relationship to the theater.

Marion: But he was smart enough to invite people like Grant Strathey {?} from Canada, and Bonnie from America, and places where the educationalists and the professionals were not at loggerheads.

Bonnie: We had gone through this.

Marion: So there was a sort of model, and he was smart enough to get those people in as well. And he was very wise; he brought everybody he could possibly think of who would be involved in dance in the United Kingdom, so that there was nobody who said, "I was left out." It was a major first step. And then came Gulbenkian Reports and then, you know, there was a whole range of things he developed afterwards.

But this is when you got to know the field in England, wasn't it?

Bonnie: That was my first introduction. And I knew that we had been through so much of it; I personally had been through so much of it in the States. So I felt that here it was an interesting challenge and that, not that I could ever do anything, actually, in a public way, because I wasn't English, and the English are very funny about that. You have to have been there a long time.

Marion: I don't think that's true.

Bonnie: Well, I did.

Marion: You did it pretty quickly.

Bonnie: But I did it in a different way, and that was through the actual Center itself, and then by opening the Center out to be seen through workshops, through taking kids on tour and stuff, ultimately developing the company, which is a visible face of what we do at the Center, at a very high standard.

And it has been our students that have made the change, because they are now in positions, over these twenty years, of some considerable authority. Their voices are being heard because they have taken administrative jobs as well as choreographic and dancer and teacher jobs. Our students go in all directions. They are writers, they are teachers, they are dance therapists, historians. It's amazing, the breadth of the Laban Center's training.

Bill: And they have an integrated view of the situation.

Bonnie: A totally integrated view. That change has been going on other places too.

Marion: But it's taken twenty years in England. Well, it took maybe ten, twelve years, and then the next years have been--{can we fill in this thought?}

Bill: So if the Gulbankian Foundation were to do another conference?

Marion: It would be very different, very different. And of course they are not doing it any more, the professional associations are doing it. Many have developed since then. There's a Council for Dance Education and Training, there's a Dance U.K., which is professional.

Bonnie: That's a lobbying organization.

Marion: Yes. And there's a choreographic group--I mean a group of choreographers, the Choreographic Association, which is part of Dance U.K. And so there are a lot of new dance organizations, which I would still wish to be much closer and still be much more together. But nevertheless, it's many, many steps forward from where they were.

Bonnie: To the point where, amazingly enough, the Labor Party has a position, a policy on dance.

Marion: And guess who wrote it? Peter Brinson.

Bonnie: Peter Brinson and Marion North.

Marion: No, no. Well, Peter Brinson did it for them. I mean I talked with Peter about it.

Peter works for us at the Laban Center, he's a consultant. And the Labor Party is being badgered. And, of course, while you're out of office it's always easy to have big policies. But they have a policy on dance, and they say that if they get in they will actually support dance.

The present government at the moment is finding it very hard to support dance because they don't really believe in it. But, but, but! there's a little chink, even in their armor, and, who knows.

Bill: Chink in the form of a person, a spokesperson?

Marion: In the form of--well, it's hard to know in these ministries where it comes from, but it's certainly Council for Dance Education and Training which has made the impact and the lobbying. And the Department for Education is now saying, "Well, if we do something, how shall we do it?" So I think that's a big chink.

Bonnie: And it's a very specific kind of thing, having to do with students, talented students having support to study.

Marion: Same opportunity as if you go to university, in the professional dance schools.

Bonnie: Which they have squeezed out almost entirely. It did exist in the form of what's called discretionary grants which means grants to study at independent schools that are not mandated or maintained by the government.

Marion: This government's policy towards local authorities, which is squeezing them of money, means that the local authorities, who used to administer the discretionary award, or still do, mostly are saying, "We don't have any money to do it." So it's not directly anti-the arts, it's a sort of round about way. But they are now saying, "If that isn't working, maybe we'll have to do something else." So I'm very optimistic at this point about it.

But that doesn't get around to you, Bonnie, and why you came and what you did. Because the first thing, what we established--and this is one of my strong memories--is, we said, "Never mind what other people are doing, let's create a course which has integrity in its own right, a course of what we want to do."

A lot of people said there's no point in doing it, there are no jobs for these people, you're wasting your time. I mean I was told many times that it was a waste of time. "Let's make something we think is right, let's do something which we believe in and go ahead and do it." And we did.

This is exactly what Bonnie--I mean, I couldn't have done it without Bonnie. She had the expertise, the knowledge, the wisdom to do those sort of things. So together we built something which really worked.

Bonnie: We also did something important with our students, I think, and that was, we said, "There isn't a job out there for you. It will be an accident if there is. You have to be prepared to create your jobs. So your creativity has to be very extensive, you have to understand what you're facing.

"Not just to have the skills and to be talented as a performer, but you have to understand something about how you go about creating a situation or entering a situation that may exist where you can make some kind of life for yourself, career for yourself."

So the kids went out with an awful lot of preparation and openness to respond to any kind of situation that might open up for them.

Bill: Did you do direct teaching about what you need to do to create positions?

Bonnie: Yes, we did.

Bill: In the form of courses?

Marion: Yes, parts of courses. We were freer at that point to really let a course develop. We knew what we wanted to cover, but it could cover it in many different routes. And while Bonnie herself was actually directing the course, and teaching it, and doing most of the work on it, then she could let it run more freely when she did what and how she did it.

Now we're much more--we're bigger for one thing, and it's much more structured and organized. We have to build those in, you know, there'll be so many classes on this and that. In the past it wasn't like that.

But what I'd like to say is, many of the students that Bonnie taught in those early days, twenty years ago, are now--they've been out in the field, they've been performers or choreographers or teachers--they are now wanting to come back to the Center to teach or to perform or to relate. And the wonderful thing is that these people are the ones who have been out creating in the field. Not every student, obviously, that would be ridiculous.

But of the numbers who are out in the field at any given moment--and there are twenty-two dance schools in our country--of that number who are out in the field, at least half if not more are from the Laban Center. So that's a big record.

Bonnie: I think the other strength is that we deemphasized technique as the goal and placed it in relationship to two other aspects: one was training and technique--these are the core topics of every course--training and technique, so that you have craft and skill, body skills that you need.

The other is the creative: the choreographic training, the crafting of work. How do you get your ideas formed and shaped, and how do you use your technique at the service of your needs.

And the other was to have theoretical training, to be trained in Laban notation, Laban analysis, so that they understand the processes, that they can look at movement, they can talk about movement, that they have some sense of the history of movement.

Then comes a second ring of dance history, criticism, sociology of dance, politics of dance, all of the things that surround, that they need. Those are the additional studies.

Marion: One of the things that is interesting, that people who have interviewed a whole range of people for jobs have said so often to me, is, "Your students know why they do something. You ask them a question and they can answer why they do it. They don't just say, 'Well, that's how I was taught,' or, 'That's because, well, that's how we do it.' They know why, and what they are about."

And I think this stems right back from Bonnie's idea, right at the beginning, that it's no good just doing, no good just creating in a vacuum. You've got to actually have an environment within which, and you've got to understand it. And therefore it attracts now very intelligent people. I don't mean intellectual in isolation, but intelligent people who really want to utilize this art form, not only for themselves but also within the wider social scene.

We have a vast number of people in England called either community dance, or art-centered dance officers, or--there's a whole range of names. But of those, at least half, if not more, come from the Center.

Bonnie: Actually, we offer training in community leadership, training for community dance workers {?}.

Marion: We do a postgraduate course in that.

Bill: Is there any equivalent in the States to this?

Bonnie: No.

Marion: And there's nothing in England other than our course, either.

Bill: I mean in the communities I don't think we have a similar--the parallel would be community theater.

Bonnie: You have a spotty sort of thing here. But it's really an art center or community center hiring a dancer. But there, it's

actually now a profession. They are called either dance animateurs or dance officers, and they are hired by the local councils to animate dance in their area. And they do it in different ways.

Sometimes they have a little company that's locally based, and they teach, and they do workshops, they tour dances to kindergartens, to hospitals and so on. They enliven the community. Or in another community where there is a of dance that goes on that's ethnic, but there are a lot of racist problems, they may stimulate festivals so that they share their cultures. It depends on where they are working how they are working.

Marion: They can come either from trained dancers who have done a performance and then go into this area, or it can come up from people who are never going to be professional dancers, like theater dancers, but are interested in dance in its wider either educational or community sense.

And on that course they learn how to create companies, they learn how to take dance classes for different age groups, they learn how to administer, arts admin, they learn bookkeeping--I don't mean they do bookkeeping, but they learn about the necessity for administration. And they do some dance politics.

Bonnie: Like how do you cope with your local council. [laughter]

Marion: Yes, that sort of thing. Et cetera.

Bonnie: One of the interesting things was that when I first came to England it was a foregone conclusion that the Laban Center, which had been given--at the time that Lisa Ullmann retired, and the actual board of the Laban Center decided that at sixty-five she should retire, they recognized that the Center was shrinking.

She resented this deeply, this forced retirement in a sense, and so did the faculty, which is what Marion had to confront. But they [the board {?}] gave the whole thing, lock, stock, and barrel, to the University of London. The University of London accepted it, and then assigned us to be under Goldsmith's. And that's where Marion was the head of the dance department.

I don't know, did they make you the head of the dance department at Goldsmith's because of that?

Marion: Yes. I didn't know this was going to happen, but they sort of head-hunted a new head of the dance department at Goldsmith's.

And when I was appointed they said, "And you will now also be interested to know the Laban Center is here, and you will head the Laban Center."

Then taking up that history, it was quite interesting, because we spent some many years with Goldsmith's as our trustees, as it were, until five years ago when it became quite clear that we could not run the two things. The change of head at Goldsmith's was always the problem. The old head--the Vice Chancellor, what we call the Warden there--had been very supportive of dance, had a dance department and had the Laban Center.

The next but two Vice Chancellors, Wardens, decided that dance was a waste of time, and they closed the dance department down, and that was after I'd already given it up and gone just to the Laban Center because I said, "I can't run both." And then within a few more years of that, something like five years ago, I said that we really should now become independent.

So, full circle round, we extricated ourselves out of London University and appointed our own trustees. And we are now self-sufficient again, which was the best thing I think we ever did in relation to Goldsmith's, because I think we would have been closed down by now.

Bonnie: Also there was a clear recognition that we had to move and develop at a certain pace. And we had to be free to do it.

Marion: Which was not the university level.

Bonnie: And we watched the university's committee techniques and so on, and dance was the bottom of the totem pole anyway. We would have been eaten up if we had become the dance department of Goldsmith's College, which was an original idea. And so we live right next door to this college, physically, in our studios and so on, which are actually against their wall and some of the grounds we rent from them.

Marion: And we pay for the use of their library to supplement our library, and our students meet their students, and there's a good relationship between student unions, and we use their cafeterias and so on. So it works out very well.

Bill: And how large are you now?

Marion: About three hundred which is where we want to be, we don't want to be bigger.

Bill: Does that mean that you generate your own funding?

Marion: No, we have no funding whatsoever except student fees. There is no funding.

Bonnie: The government gives us nothing.

Marion: There's no funding from anywhere. So the only income is student fees, and we have about two hundred undergraduates and about a hundred graduate students.

What we're now doing--but this is jumping ahead on the history--what we're now doing is taking a big impetus to develop our graduate school. And probably the proportion will go up a bit, maybe half and half.

Bonnie: We've actually had a graduate school, but not in name. Now we're calling it a graduate school.

Marion: We have two major MA's, dance therapy and dance studies. We have a graduate program of independent study, which means you can choose what you want to do, whether it leads to a diploma or an MA. We have M.Phil. and Ph.D. students, and we're getting a rising number of those students.

Bonnie: They come from all over the world, the Center is increasingly international. And I think the thing that will save us, because of the lack of support from within the country, is the international emphasis that we've been able to make over the years.

Marion: But that emphasis of overseas has been developed in two ways, one by direct advertising and direct going out and having auditions, but mainly it's been done by the group that Bonnie referred to, the performance group, Transitions, touring, getting to be known, getting to be--it's our front.

It's like anybody else has sort of wonderful brochures and so on--we have the dance company. They are the people who are really doing at least, you know, a good 80 percent of the overseas marketing, as it were.

Bonnie: But I think the other thing is that Laban's work itself has had international interest over the years. There are people--now our students are out in different countries heading developments of dance. And they are the ones that are sending their students or coming back to study themselves, so there's a kind of international development.

Marion: We have about thirty-four different countries represented in our student body. It is very broad. We now have to offer English courses--we've incorporated English training courses for students. This is mainly for our Far Eastern students.

Bonnie: I think the sequencing of the development of the BA Honours degree, and then the MA, the first MA--. There was no degree course in dance as a subject anywhere in Europe.

Marion: And there still is only in England.

Bonnie: And still only in England. And we were the first to fight for and be given a validation for a BA Honours degree. We refused to do a BA Ordinary, because we said that this did not represent the quality of scholarly studies that we wanted our students to achieve, and believed they could achieve, as well as their technical training, their dance training.

So you were running a conservatory and an academic program in an integrated way. And in Europe they only know, for the arts, conservatory program, which does not include anything more than a most superficial bit of history, musical training, etc. They don't get any sense of dance in the larger society.

Marion: I think even in Britain, in the other institutions, they don't do much of it either.

Bonnie: They don't still.

Bill: It's a very narrow view of the performer as a super-specialist?

Marion: That's right, yes. And of course, on the whole, there aren't the openings for people with that narrow training. If you go to the Royal Ballet School, your aim is to get into the Royal Ballet. If you don't get into the Royal Ballet, you might get into another ballet company of a lesser level. But if you don't do that, you have nothing. You're finished, because you've got nothing else to offer.

Bonnie: One of the interesting other parts is that then we wanted to be able to have our students come back, after they had had some experience in the field, and to do an MA. And so we began, as soon as we had the BA Honours degree awarded and had had some experience with developing of that program, we started in on getting an MA recognized. And we got an MA in dance studies, which is a taught MA, covering only one year, which is interesting.

Marion: Intensive though.

Bonnie: Intensive. They choose, from nine subjects, three that they wish to study in dance. And they follow those courses--they are taught courses--one of which then becomes, with advice, the area in which they focus their dissertation. They study through three terms. They have to pass all three subjects. And then they work through the summer on their dissertation.

Bill: Sounds very demanding.

Bonnie: It's very demanding. And now it's done so that they can do it on a part-time basis.

Marion: Yes, they can take two or three years over it now.

[End Tape 1, Side B; Begin Tape 2, Side A]

Marion: --in England is not only the work directly with the students, and directly with programs, and directly with planning and thinking ahead, but also the emphasis we've placed on the staff development, the fact that we now have a faculty of something like forty-five people, all of whom are able to develop their own interests because they have a day a week as part of their job, paid for, if their proposal meets with our approval--that means they have to submit each year what they want to do next year to get their day, their free study day.

This has created such an educated group of people, because not only do we do that, but we also have seminars within the staff so that, for instance, every year we have a retreat for the staff, every February. And we're now setting up, as a matter of interest, a whole series of day seminars for the staff on teaching methodology, how are they teaching. This is all experienced teachers.

Then the few young ones, young girl ones that we take in, can learn from the more experienced ones. And the more experienced ones can have a look at their own teaching methods and see whether it's really fulfilling what we hope it will.

Overall, the whole structure of the Center is so clear now. It's a very clear management structure, a very clear organization in committees, the responsibility to serve on a committee and then to report back, and then, you know, the whole thing is there. It's a pattern which would suit an institution of two or three thousand, but it's there, as three hundred, it still works.

And I would like to make a statement on that one for this record, because I think that is something which very few people, institutions, actually give a lot of concern about, certainly in England. And in the dance institutions I don't think at all, except for the Center. I think it's very unique.

Bill: It strikes me that that goes very much against the idea of people coming in as separate entities and you develop your own program.

Marion: That's right.

Bill: You're really focussed on the community.

Marion: We're really focussed on making it a cohesive whole. And of course everybody, all the students, are represented on all the committees. And so they have a big input.

And then within that firm structure we can take in the artists from outside. So we invite in every year two or three artists to do special pieces of work. And they come in, and they are more of an entity in their own right. But it doesn't disrupt, it just enhances because it's not now going off on another tangent, it's simply within the framework, this is a special experience.

Bill: Where did that vision come from?

Marion: I would say it came mainly from Bonnie. It certainly developed in talking between us, and with one or two other senior people at the Center. We set up a little group of four people: Peter Brinson, whom we've mentioned, was one of them. And Bonnie, and myself. And another person who has been very helpful to us, a sociology man called Paul Filmer {?}. He does a sociology option at the MA.

We've met every month, to sort of just throw ideas around. And these kind of meetings, I think, are terribly important. Not just nitty-gritty organizational, but vision of what might happen.

Bonnie: I think the retreat which we do every February, early in February, for about three days, we take--everybody on the faculty goes.

Marion: Everyone has to go.

Bonnie: And we take them to a conference center or hotel or some place, some place interesting, too. And we shift--from the Cotswolds to the south--to someplace so that they aren't distracted.

And we focus on a major issue, or several major issues. It's a kind of blueprinting for the future. And getting, and dragging sometimes, the ones that are getting apathetic or flaccid in some way into being excited again about the field they are in. And seeing where we're going, keeping our eye on goals--

Bill: Long range planning and policies, that sort of thing?

Bonnie: --and long range planning.

Marion: Last year we were very concerned about staff development and--what's it called?

Bonnie: Appraisal.

Marion: Staff appraisal. This is a great thing in England now, that everybody has to be appraised in whether they are effective and whether they are producing and all that sort of stuff. Well, I don't personally like the whole idea of appraising professional colleagues--. And then they get a promotion or they don't get a promotion and so on.

So we have devised our own staff appraisal scheme, which is nothing to do with anything to do with promotion or money or so on. It's entirely to do with their own understanding of themselves. So it's on a voluntary basis, which means there's a lot of pressure that everybody does take part. And we've all voted we all do, so--which is fine. But it's to do with finding out about what you do yourself.

Because we believe--and I have kept with this, and I will keep with it--that pay must be on pay scales which are not arbitrarily arguable by you. You can't come to me--I mean, you can come to me and say, "I'm so good, I need an increment," but you won't get one. You will only get it on the scale you are. And yes, it's true that some are better teachers than others at the same scale. Nevertheless, it cuts out all the competitive, money-grabbing kind of approach to the whole thing.

So staff appraisal has become for us a different object from other places. And we are prepared, in the next year or two years when we are inspected, to justify why we do it our way and not their way.

Bill: You're really doing staff development.

Marion: Very much so, very much so.

Bonnie: Yes.

Bill: The focus is on development, not on measuring people.

Marion: That's right. And quite frankly, if there's anybody who is so bad they we shouldn't have them, then I'll try and get rid of them, because there's no point in keeping somebody--. And on the whole, that works. I mean there are a few that you would say, "Well, you know, maybe they are not pulling quite as much weight as somebody else, but, okay, they are doing an acceptable job."

Bonnie: You always have a few.

Bill: Were you able to select people who had pretty much the same values, so that by and large the group worked?

Marion: It's been interesting, hasn't it, looking at staffing?

Bonnie: Yes.

Marion: Sometimes it's very much we need a specialist in a particular area, so we try to get a specialist in a particular area. We hope we get the best person we can get, and sometimes we compromise. Sometimes it is that the person is so good, how can we incorporate them into the staff by shifting around a bit? Most of our staff are not so exclusive they can't take on more than one or other thing.

Bonnie: That is in terms of the subject they teach.

Marion: Yes, about in the teaching area.

Bonnie: They are flexible.

Marion: They are a little bit more flexible, yes. Not everybody.

So it's been like this. And we sometimes lose, as we are doing this term, somebody we value very, very highly indeed, and I'm really hating to lose.

Bill: Why is that person going?

Marion: She's young, and she needs to break away and do something else. It's right for her, there's no problem about it from any--she

doesn't want to go in one sense, but she knows she ought to expand her experience. And I have to say, "Yes, you're right." She goes saying, "When I've been away for a bit, I hope I can come back again."

Bill: How many people on the staff are graduates of the program?

Bonnie: That's increased incredibly over the years.

Marion: It's increased by--a lot of the people that come to us, we persuade them to do the MA. So a lot of people who look like they are from us are not from us originally, although they have done the MA with us. We give them time in their teaching schedule to undertake the MA, say, over three years, to take one course a year.

Bonnie: But on the faculty now we must have three or four people who were our undergraduates who have been out in the profession and then come back and we've had them teach.

Marion: There are only about three, I think.

Bonnie: Probably. But some of those that can now be said to be Center graduates were teachers who, for their development, did the MA, which we encouraged them to do.

Marion: Yes, or a Ph.D.

Bonnie: But we also have Anna Sanchez Goldberg. She was a PhD student, and she's brilliant, and she did her MA at Temple in the United States. So we have a terrific mixture, but more and more they have a relationship to the Center. I think there's an increasing number of them that have been trained in some part of their education in the Center. And that's very useful for us, because they know the ropes, so to speak. They have a sort of philosophic orientation.

Marion: What we're not interested in is training undergraduates and keeping them on indefinitely. That's not such a good idea.

Bonnie: No, we want them to go out.

Bill: When we did that interview with Anthony, I certainly got the picture of Transitions being set up explicitly so that people would have their year and then go on.

Bonnie: Go out eventually.

Marion: Exactly. That's the same principle. After they've been out seven to ten years I'm very interested in them, because they've got away from the "mother" end of it, and they've become themselves. And then they bring something.

We have two teachers who are really quite brilliant young teachers--young, they are in their early thirties--who were undergraduates with Bonnie, you see, because by that time we were already taking that time.

Bonnie: And others will come back to us in time. I can see some that in a few years will be applying, because they are ready to shift from being purely performers. And some of them are now, I see, being idea people in the dance field like Emma Gladstone, who is incredible.

Marion: Absolutely, people that are on your board--[to Bill] you know, the Bonnie Bonnie Choreography Fund.

Bill: Yes.

Marion: You haven't reached that yet [in the oral history], you haven't reached seventy, have you?

Bonnie: No.

Marion: Because that was set up when she was seventy.

Well, we've about exhausted the generalities, haven't we, of the Center?

Bonnie: I think so. There are very nice things that have happened, and I think there is something to be said about the building itself.

Marion: Oh, yes. The building is exciting. It's grown like Topsy.

Bill: How did that come about?

Marion: Well, the very nice Warden that we originally had at Goldsmith's was very sympathetic. And they were given an old primary school right next door to the college, because the primary school built itself a new one.

Bonnie: This was the primary school of an Episcopal church, that is, a Church of England, which is adjacent to the college.

Marion: And this was an old Victorian schoolhouse. Typical, little lavatories outside, and then you go in and four classrooms in a

block, just a straight block: one, two, three, four, like that. And they all had coal fireplaces in them. And this was a real grotty place, falling down, and the roof was nothing.

Anyway, we took that over as our first building, and we converted it into one long studio, two short studios, two little studios, and some little offices. Then the church next to that, because it was a church school, of course--there was a church and then a playground--the church became redundant because they built a little chapel. They only had about four or five people going to the church, and it was a big, dank, Victorian church.

Bonnie: There were more than four or five, but--.

Marion: Anyway, we took that over, and we converted that by putting floors into the church and making seminar rooms, tutorial rooms, studios of the big spaces, and a beautiful library.

Bill: Did you purchase the building, or did the church give it to you outright?

Marion: The church commissioners gave it to us on a hundred-year lease, five pounds a year. But we paid them so many hundreds of thousands for it, yes, we did buy it originally. And then we bought the playground, which was a separate transaction. And then we bought a piece of land from Goldsmith's, or rather we leased it on a long lease, to build the theater. So we had the schoolhouse, the theater, the intermediate building on the playground which became a kind of atrium area for the students, a meeting place, plus offices, and then the church. So we have thirteen studios.

Bill: Who put this together?

Marion: Bonnie Bonnie and Marion Marion, basically. [laughter]

Bonnie: Yes, basically.

Bill: What a combo.

Marion: It really was, because we sacked our architect.

Bonnie: He kept saying, "You can't do this, and you can't do that." And we said, "But we have to, and we can do it."

Marion: Well, and the other thing was, he was charging the earth, of course, for his services.

Bonnie: And Marion's husband has a friend who is a builder, and we asked him to look at this whole thing with us. We had already converted, or built, three studios, which Marion called the theater building. It didn't become a theater building--gradually over years it became a theater building--because we needed everything for teaching.

And so we did one thing in that building: we had three studios, and we created a movable wall between the two studios so it became a kind of theater space. You could have your audience in one studio looking at the dance in the other studio. It is now a whole theater and, happily, named in my honor.

Marion: It's called the Bonnie Theater of the Laban Center. It's lovely. And it's got a lovely plaque as you go in. And that was for your seventy-fifth.

Bonnie: Yes, it was. That was a great surprise, because I didn't know all this was going on. The plaque had been a contest between young designers.

Bill: To design the plaque?

Marion: Yes.

Bonnie: To design the plaque and so on. And they had done the whole thing just marvelously. It was a total surprise.

Marion: And she really didn't know about that one, did you?

Bonnie: I didn't know anything about it.

Marion: It's made in metal, you know, it's a beautiful piece.

Bonnie: So anyway, I think the, I think--I think I've forgotten my trend here.

Marion: You were saying about the development of the theater and development of spaces. First you built it as one thing, and then you take it into something else.

Bonnie: That was the important thing. The thing that we did with one studio was that we--at that time we were trying to relate to the local community. And we felt we had a real responsibility.

This is a very poor community with very bad race relations, and we'd had riots in the area and so on. We felt that we had to, somehow or other, make the Center more open to the community.

So we actually built a building which has a community studio. You could go in at night and not have to open the whole building.

That's all changed, because the circumstances have changed gradually too. So that what we originally offered has shifted to now we take the responsibility for community training and leadership and going out into the community.

Bill: Rather than bringing the community in.

Marion: We, no, we still have our youth group. And the youth group is run by a graduate of Bonnie's course, and he's a very lively young man. He has them in on Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays, and we give him space free.

Bill: He does dance work with them?

Marion: Yes. He does wonderful dance work with them.

Bonnie: Incredible.

Marion: They travel all over the world. I mean, this youth group is incredible. He has about eighty members, and they get into the company when they get good enough. So he has about twenty-five in the company, and the others are all striving to get there, and working hard to make it.

Bonnie: And these are kids who are unemployed, off the streets, have nothing, I mean, they were--he gets them motivated to go to college, to go on in dance if they are interested, or do something else. It's really remarkable.

Marion: As a genuine community group.

Bonnie: And they also love their community. He gets them out dancing for kids in the community, dancing in the hospitals, and so on.

Bill: So people don't leave the community.

Bonnie: They don't leave their community, they try to do something about it.

And we have a graduate who heads another company in a black community center, which is a big company now in England.

Marion: Which is Eyrick { }?

Bonnie: Which is Eyrick.

Marion: That's just down the road from us.

And we have another. The young man who heads the Greenwich Art Center, which is huge now, and wonderfully imaginative in dance performance, he was on our community course. So they are all around us.

Bill: Where is the Center? I've forgotten now.

Marion: Southeast London, in New Cross.

Bonnie: New Cross, Blackheath, that whole area just south of the river. The interesting thing is that this young man who 's on the community course was hired by the--well, first of all I should tell you that our new director, the salary was taken over by the local authority.

Marion: But not any more, they dropped it.

Bonnie: Did they drop it?

Marion: He hasn't had any money for about six years, but he's just gone on doing it and he's not got a penny for it.

Bill: But there had been a recognition of the value of it?

Bonnie: Yes. And then they hired this other man. So he was picked and they had two dance officers for a while. Well, he has formed the Greenwich Dance Agency which is now funded by the Arts Council. And there are so many dancers living in this area because these are the kids who studied with us, and lived there, and found little apartments and bed sits, and they've never moved out. They go to the center of London to dance and so on, but now they are dancing in the dance agency, getting their classes, teaching in it, and so on.

Bill: They moved there to go to the Center?

Bonnie: That's right.

Bill: Are there people who grew up in the neighborhood and came into the Center?

Marion: Well, unfortunately--we used to have a lot from the neighborhood coming on to courses, and we haven't had any for a long time because the grants stopped. Mainly they were black dancers. And the number of black students in the Center, for instance, has

dropped from about 25 percent down to about 5 percent, and that's because of the grants.

Bonnie: And that's because they are discriminated against, literally.

Marion: But if this government does do something about grants, that could redress itself. I hope so, because it's very bad.

Bonnie: It's very sad, because some of our most talented kids have gone on to do interesting things--these were black students--and they couldn't have gotten on a BA Honours course because their educational training isn't strong enough. But they had talent, and they had intelligence.

Bill: And motivation.

Bonnie: And motivation. They have become so articulate, and they've learned the hard way. And they are well-read and they are really amazing.

[end tape 2, side A, nothing on side B]

Transcriber: Judith Cederblom

